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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

HIGH PERFORMANCE FEMALE ATHLETE RETIREMENT

BY

© SANDRA L. KIRBY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT STUDIES

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1986

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S Kirby
9625 - 76 Ave
Edmonton, Alberta
T6C 0K4.

Date: July 15, 1986.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled HIGH PERFORMANCE FEMALE ATHLETE RETIREMENT submitted by SANDRA LOUISE KIRBY in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

H A Scott
Supervisor

S W Bedingfield

Pat. Rafferty

Judith Golec

Dallas Cullen

Susan Birrell
External Examiner

Date July 16, 1986

For the Advancement of Women and Sport

ABSTRACT

The central purpose of this research was to discover how and under what conditions female athletes leave high performance sport. A review of the literature on athlete retirement revealed that there was limited research attention to the experiences of female athletes and a virtual absence of investigations on retirement of high performance female athletes. This study is seen as filling the large gap in the literature on athlete retirement. It is also seen as the first tentative steps towards a theory of female retirement from competitive sport.

Data collection consisted of a survey and selected interviews with female athletes named to the Canadian National Team at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal. The survey revealed that 95% of the respondents (n=70) left high performance sport between 1976 and 1985 and that respondents were exceptionally well educated, primarily unmarried and ranged from 21 to 43 years of age. Approximately one-third had competed in more than one Olympic Games as their competitive athletic careers spanned 3 to 19 years.

The 30 interviews generated volumes of rich, detailed data of the leaving experiences of high performance female athletes. Analysis of these data is presented in five chapters. First, the structure of sport is described as a rhythmic, ongoing cycle of competitive opportunities which has considerable influence on how and under what other conditions athletes leave high performance sport. The next four chapters examine the ways in which athletes make sense of their retirement experiences.

Decisions to Leave are the first conditions presented. In these accounts, athletes report having some control over how they leave high performance sport. The next two conditions, *Injury and/or Ill Health* and *Barriers to Continued Participation* illustrate and emphasize the external, situational ways in which athletes experience leaving high performance sport. The diversity of athlete's leaving experiences is clearly evident. The last condition, *Nearing Leaving*, illustrates that athletes generally make sense of their retirement experiences in a reflective manner, after they have left high performance sport. Also, their sport experiences immediately prior to the initiation of the retirement process form part of that understanding. The history and biography of athletes are necessary to a meaningful accounting of athletes' retirement experiences.

The final chapter presents the product of this research, the *Retirement Path*, consisting of the awareness of retirement, the pre-leaving interval, the act of leaving and the aftermath. Each component part of the retirement path is emergent from the characteristics of the conditions of retirement. Not all athletes experienced all components of this transitional path. Some skipped component parts or moved back and forth along the path.

The concepts which assist in the explanation of high performance female athlete retirement are addressed and a theoretical rejoinder with the review of the literature is provided. This study concludes with implications for further research.

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I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Harvey Scott for his consistent guidance while serving as my supervisor and for his most gracious and timely rescues during my times of need. I would also like to thank Dr. Judith Golec for her support, friendship and constructive assistance during these past four years. She was unfailingly intuitive throughout. I am also grateful to Pat Rafferty and Dr. Dallas Cullen, Marilyn Assheton-Smith and Dr. Wendy Bedingfield for their advice, expertise and concern along the way and for their contributions at my oral exam.

The lengthy preparation of the interview transcripts was done by Mrs. S. Kirby, my mother. At regular intervals, an enormous package of freshly typed transcripts would arrive on my doorstep, postage paid. She made all the difference in the world to the rapid completion of the data collection stages. The proofreading was done by Ms. A. LeRougetel, not once, but many times. She, Monty and Stephen deserve considerable credit for the fact that the dissertation reached closure. Further, when the writing came thinly and the worries were thick and heavy, the women in the community, graduate students, my family and friends supported my efforts. They were also there to celebrate its conclusion as if it was there own.

Finally, as I conducted the research, I learned a great deal about the lives of some of Canada's high performance female athletes. It is their lives that fill these pages and I hope that I have done justice to their accounts. I wish to acknowledge the profoundness of my debt to them by dedicating this work to the advancement of women and sport.

PREFACE

At the high performance level, Canadian female athletes have a long history of involvement and success. Canadian women have been summer Olympic competitors since 1928 and have won 23 (up to 1980) medals during that time. As winter Olympic competitors since 1932, women added another 13 medals to that total. It is well documented that although women won only one-half as many medals as their male counterparts, they had considerably less than one-half the opportunity to do so[1].

Also, in Canada there are many outstanding female athletes. Some never won Olympic medals. For example, Christilot Boylen Hansen has attended every Olympic Games possible since 1964. Her equestrain career has spanned 20 years and six Olympic Games. Another outstanding athlete, Abigail Hoffman is a four-time Olympian and current director of Sport Canada. There are many others, including Debbie Brill (Track and Field four time Olympian), Diane Jones-Konihowski (Track and Field three time Olympian) and Susan Nattrass (Canada's first female representative in Olympic Trap Shooting and six time world champion). Another athlete, Susan Holloway, was a medal winner in the 1984 Olympic Games. She has the distinction of being the only Canadian female athlete to compete in both summer and winter Olympic Games in the same year (cross country skiing and kayaking, 1976). These women are exceptional women who have achieved a rare degree of public profile and fame for their athleticism.

However, little is known about these women as individuals who continue to train and compete for Canada or who retire from high performance sport. As a sociologist, I have become accustomed to searching and researching the structures and meanings of peoples' experience. This dissertation addressess the leaving or retirement experiences of the female athletes who were participants in the summer Olympics of 1976. The dissertation is also a labour of love. As an athlete, I was a member of that team and an international competitor from 1976 to 1981 in the sport of rowing. When I left high performance sport in 1981, it was because I could not continue to focus my energies and attention on the sport at the level required to remain competitive. Removing the many layers of being an athlete took some time. In fact, it is still occurring. I haven't retired totally. I am still involved as a competitor. I last raced in the World Master's Games in 1985 in my Olympic sport and in my new sport, Marathon Canoeing. I can still manage a rowing shell with ease in spite of my back injuries from the sport, coach with technical expertise and handle an adjustable wrench with precision. I keep my medals and souvenirs in a special box in my closet and I still dream of the faint "swoosh" that comes from the rhythm of a blade dropping into the water and then releasing the water lightly and cleanly. From those experiences, I understand sport as a high performance athlete. My research self overlaps with my athlete self and it is the blending of those skills and experiences which colour the research and the writing of this dissertation.

---

[1] In fact, Canadian women have outperformed their male counterparts. Men have won 54 (up to 1980) summer Olympic medals since 1928 but had the opportunity to compete in more than twice the number of sports, and within those sports, more events. Including the 1976 summer Olympic Games, 1978 Commonwealth Games, the 1979 Pan American Games and the 1980 Winter Olympic Games (1980 summer Olympics were boycotted), Canadian women formed approximately 20% of the teams but won approximately 30% of the medals (Hall and Richardson, 1982:43).

Normally, acknowledgements are a routine part of the dissertation. However, I would like to deviate from the pattern to more fully express my special indebtedness to women who, for the purposes of this research, were respondents. Not only are they high performance Olympic athletes but they are also individuals with many other dimensions. When this research began, it was their interest, encouragement and cooperation which enabled the research to emerge as a rich exploration of high performance female athlete retirement. It is those athletes' thoughts, descriptions, expressions, images, stories and analogies that are the bases of this research. Clearly, the thesis is about retirement. That is a very small slice of experience in the complex lives of the athletes and of their entire lived experience. This dissertation is written for them as much as it is for me and for the development of the substantive understanding of sport retirement.

I have introduced myself in the study simply because I chose the method that allowed me, the researcher, to consider the special circumstance where my respect for and my attachment to high performance sport were of great benefit to the study of retirement. Throughout the research, I never lost sight of the more personal aspects of the research even though much of the research is abstracted from the actual lived experiences of the 1976 female Olympic athletes. This exhausts the literary licence given to the author.

As the reader moves through the dissertation intersecting sport personalities will be encountered. In most cases, the athletes are camoflaged. I have tried to provide an accurate though intentionally incomplete context for the quotes of the athletes by identifying something of their history and biography throughout the presentation of the data. The dissertation is written so that it can be understood by the scholarly reader but also with a rider that the athletes must be able to recognize their experiences in the text. The overall intent is to develop a common sense display of ideas and their analysis in order to inform athletes and non-athletes of the experiences of leaving high performance sport. Discussions about retirement with athletes was the beginning of this research. Therefore, I introduce the reader to the topic in the same way. It provides each reader with an introduction to the athletes and their retirement.

For the reader, there is a composite picture of high performance athletes and their sport experiences provided first by the scholarly discussion, leading to an essential discussion of the methodology and then to the presentation of the findings of this study; the information about leaving high performance sport.

The first chapter reviews the scholarly literature which includes life course, career development and social gerontological perspectives and their applications to sport retirement. It concludes that sport sociology has not adequately addressed high performance female athlete retirement. The purpose of the study and statement of the problem are included.

Chapter two describes the data collection and plan of analysis. Specifically, the chapter covers the basic research design, survey data collection, analysis of survey results, data collection with in-depth interviews, plan of analysis of the interviews and presentation of the data. Delimitations and limitations of the study are described.

The remaining chapters contain data gathered from interviews conducted for this study. The order of the chapters, and thus, the order of the presentation of the research material is determined by the development of the conceptual areas.

Chapter three examines the rhythms of sport at the high performance level. It is here that the structure of high performance sport is exposed. Since athlete's experiences can not be isolated from the organizational activities in which they participate, the sport training programmes and competitions primarily designed and operated by the competitive sport organizations in Canada are described.

As the data were gathered, the conditions of retirement emerged. Chapter four explores the conditions of leaving where athletes report a considerable measure of control over how they leave high performance sport. Chapters five and six examine the external, situational conditions of leaving, *Injury and/or Illness* and *Barriers to Continued Participation*. Chapter seven is an examination of one final condition, *Nearing Leaving*. This chapter clearly links the nature of athletes' sport experiences prior to retirement with the manner in which retirement is experienced.

The final chapter presents the conceptual abstractions drawn from the research. These analyses ultimately described a conceptual framework or theoretical product of the research called *The Path of Retirement*. The path of retirement is determined as the course or pattern of four parts; awareness of retirement, the pre-leaving interval, the act of leaving and the aftermath. Not all athletes were able to experience all segments sequentially. Some athletes did not experience the retirement path in a sequential order[2] and/or "skipped past" entire segments. The interactive nature of the relation between theory and data in this research quided the emergence of that product. Recurrent themes or concepts are then described and implications for further research are addressed.

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[2] That is, some athletes left high performance competition but later returned to the same or other sport at the high performance level.

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I. CHAPTER ONE: HIGH PERFORMANCE FEMALE ATHLETE RETIREMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, social scientists have shown increased interest in identifying and describing transitions that individuals experience throughout their adult lives. Within the sport milieu, this same interest is evidenced by the recent appearance of numerous research articles and popular accounts focused on one particular transition, athlete retirement.

Concurrently, though quite unrelated, there has also been an enormous increase in the number of high performance female athletes who have represented Canada in international competition. These women have been more highly trained and more successful in a greater number of sports and events than ever before in Canadian history. Given this recent pervasiveness of women in competitive sport, it seems natural to ask how these women experience athlete retirement.

Athlete retirement is a form of transition, that is, the passage from an earlier to a later stage of development or formation *or* a passing from one condition, action, or (rarely) place, to another (Onions, 1973: 2347). Retirement, as a particular form of transition, is used to describe, in this case, the transition from competitive sport to something else. Although the term retirement may be largely unsatisfactory for this research, it does represent a concept that allows for discussion about how athletes leave competitive sport. In this research, an attempt will be made to delineate what is the retirement experience of female athletes.

Consider first, the following examples. In early 1970, one of Canada's most successful international athletes suffering from a recurring shoulder injury decided to 'retire' from swimming. Her career had spanned thirteen years and included world records and Olympic medals. After retiring, she expressed concern over her lack of preparation for leaving swimming, her inability to fill the void afterwards and her lack of coping skills for everyday living. As she recalled[3], she spent the two years subsequent to leaving the sport searching for someone to manage her life as her coach had done. In the second example, another athlete was described by the media in the following way:

---

[3] Personal communication, Dec. 28, 1983.

> Once considered the flower child of track, who 'retired' after the 1972 and 1976 Olympic Games and again in '81 to have a baby, Brill said..."I won the Commonwealth Games gold medal in 1982 because nobody else wanted it. I didn't jump well. Before and after '82, I've been plagued by injuries, first my back...I can see beyond the '84 Olympics in Los Angeles. I'll quit when I get tired of the sport. (Toronto Star, Feb. 27, 1984: C10)

Both examples illustrate transitions taking place. In the first example, the athlete described a disruption or change that seemed afterwards to require some adjustment on her part. The second example describes the transition as reversible and occuring more than once. In each example, there is reference to physical injury and, in the first example, this is given as the reason for retiring. Also, both athletes allude to choice. The first athlete "decided to retire". The second athlete will "quit when..." she chooses. Other influences on her retirement may be her pregnancy and parenting and her competitive environment. These examples illustrate that women athletes participate in a retirement transition which may be unique from that of men.

The central purpose of this study is to discover and explain how and under what conditions high performance female athletes in Canada leave their 'amateur' competitive activities. Research to this time has been heavily concentrated on male athletes or former athletes with professional sport histories (Mihovilovic, 1969: Svoboda and Vanek, 1981) primarily in baseball, hockey, football, boxing and soccer (Greendorfer, 1984). The exclusion of women from the majority of the sport retirement literature has resulted in a sifting through of a considerable volume of social research for rare accounts and explanations which include some reference to women.

Unfortunately, many of the early studies on sport retirement were not based on sound research or careful interpretation. Some of the first accounts appeared as 'scissors and paste' descriptions of women athletes' lives after they ceased high performance competition. Kaplan (1977), for example, wrote a description of the 'what next crisis', problems of being overweight, initial adjustment problems and the future plans of two American female athletes. Neal (1978) explored the dilemma of an outstanding female player becoming a coach. Although rich in description, such accounts reveal little about how and under what conditions female athletes generally experience athletic retirement.

Further, the study of women athletes was assumed to be either identical to that of men (and thus, not worthy of independent study) or able to be 'fit into' or 'tacked on to' existing studies (Fardy, 1978). McPherson wrote that

> there have been few studies of former elite amateur (Olympic) athletes and no empirical studies of former female athletes. Therefore, the data base consists of former male professional athletes in the traditional spectator sports... (McPherson, 1977: 54).

Miller's research on "Profiles of Veteran Athletes" makes no references to women, although presumably, there are veteran female athletes. In both studies, conclusions are drawn in a generic fashion and do not indicate that they refer specifically to male athlete retirement. Further, the use of male gender-specific terminology available primarily to men (e.g. rites of passage to manhood) in the context of sport simply reinforces the assertion that sport itself generates gender related issues. This is illustrated in the work of Bratten which posits that

> an advanced athletic program, once you're in it, teaches you quality - perseverence (and) there is a direct link between honors won on the playing field and later success in business. (Bratten, 1979: 17)

Such connections do not take the experiences of women athletes into account, nor has the link between athletic success and business success been established for women athletes.

All too frequently, studies which have included women have subjected these athletes to a microscopic analysis outside the context of their total sport experience. For example, Brooks (1979) examined the problems of women athletes who were coached by female coaches for the first time. The passage from being an athlete to being a coach is not understood. Nor is it likely that an adequate explanation for the problem Brooks identified can be found without examining such passages. Further, the social context of women's lives in the sport milieu must be taken into account. By isolating women from the social and cultural milieu in which they live, such studies actually distort the experiences of their respondents rather than explaining them.

In similar fashion, studies which are initiated on the basis of assumptions gained from primarily all-male research undoubtedly explore female athlete retirement according to limited and perhaps inappropriate frameworks. For example, even two of the most progressive researchers, Werthner and Orlick, introduced a research proposal in the following manner:

> In their attempt to be among the best in the world, Canadian athletes have to give up many social and career opportunities...{and} upon retirement from their sport careers, may lead to problems in adjustment to a new and perhaps vastly different lifestyle. In light of this program, and potential retirement problems, a detailed study is required to investigate the problems facing athletes retiring from high level competition and the type of programs needed to assist them in their readjustment. (Werthner and Orlick, 1980: 1).

The assumptions are clear: athletes must give up social and career opportunities to be successful, athletes retire from sport careers, such retirement is potentially problematic and readjustment can be assisted through special programs. The point to be made is not that these assumptions are false. Rather, excluding any distinction between the sport experiences of women and men affirms the erroneous assumption that male and female sport experiences are identical. Ultimately, this assumption leads to a lack of recognition of women's experiences as athletes and as women leaving high performance sport.

The current study analyzes how high performance female athletes leave competitive sport. Without such fundamental description and explanation, research about adaptation programs and career planning is limited, and in fact, pure conjecture.

B. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The discipline of sport sociology has utilized three major theoretical perspectives in the examination of transitions such as retirement. These theoretical prespectives which form a review of literature on retirement have been applied to sport. As a result, there is a reliance of sport on such theory. By analysing each in relation to the high performance female athlete retirement, it becomes possible to evaluate their utility for guiding the research at hand.

The Life Course Perspective

The life course perspective is conceptualized as a progression of orderly changes as individuals age. Both biological and sociocultural timetables are understood to govern the sequences of changes (Neugarten and Hagestad, 1976). Major life paths such as biological and social aging, the family, and work all interact in a somewhat synchronous fashion: a predictable life course. Perhaps the exemplary work in the life course perspective is Erikson's (1959) neopsychoanalytic research on developmental stages over the life span. Erikson concentrated on the study of identity crises which he interpreted to be the problems individuals must solve in the appropriate developmental stages. Transition from stage to stage in psycho-social development is dependent on the resolution of identify conflicts. Sheehy (1976; 1981) has offered an expansion of Erikson's work into adult stages of development. She presents life as a predictable series of crises in Passages (1976) and subsequently explores the ways of negotiating these passages in Pathfinders (1981). Scarf (1980) writes specifically about the psychological tasks encountered in the lives of adult women.

Within the life course perspective, women and men are perceived to have different crises or transition points across the life span. For reasons that stem from biology and from socialization, marked differences between the genders in the phases and the timing have been expected. Women's life courses, for example, have been viewed as timed in relation to the family, whereas, men's life courses have been viewed in relation to occupation. Neugarten and Hagestad (1976) report that such differences may now be disappearing as women achieve more public roles.

The research in sport retirement that utilizes this perspective concentrates on the crisis aspects of transition from competitive sport and the identity negotiations that can assist adjustment. McLaughlin (1981a; 1981b) presents case study information on the trauma of retirement in such a provocative manner that readers begin to understand the obligation on the part of sport organizations to provide adjustment programs.

> There is a tremendous potential for cruelty built into the sport system. The athletes, in a sense, are products handpicked at a ripe age, their growth and development carefully watched and controlled, marketed just as they peak, and discarded when they are of no further use. Throughout the process there are inevitable struggles, thrills (etc.) that account for the vast majority of athletes feeling positive about having taken part in the whole crazy system. But, when it's over...that's when the real potential for cruelty shows its face...it throws [her] not to the lions, but to an empty stadium; and for many people, it means starting life over again under a totally new set of rules. (McLaughlin, 1981a: 4)

McLaughlin identifies the crisis of leaving and places the responsibility for such crises on the sport organizations. Ogilvie and Howe (1981) choose to address more specifically the social, psychological and financial problems encountered by retiring athletes and they support preparatory counselling to ease athlete adjustment after retirement. In similar fashion, Svoboda and Vanek (1981: 37) suggest preparing athletes for retirement by arranging "all circumstances of the athletes' retirement from high level competition... to minimize...the described stress."

However, none of the sport research fully adopts a life course perspective. Although references are made to athlete development, as well as the predictable crises of retirement and management of such crises, it remains difficult to apply a life course perspective to athlete retirement.

The Career Development Perspective

The second major sociological perspective to examine transitions such as retirement is the career development cycle. Here it is suggested that the stages and tasks of a career cycle are related to the biosocial life cycle (the life course perspective) because both are linked to age and cultural norms (Schein, 1978: 36). In this manner, the terms career, career change and retirement are defined in relation to the external (institutional) dimensions and the internal (individual) dimensions of career occupants' experiences (Schein, 1978; Watts, 1981). The definition of retirement in this perspective is as a final stage of one's occupational life cycle.

In sport, athletic careers have generally been characterized by the duration and relative success of athletes' performances. Several authors, notably Kidd (1984) and Rigauer (1980) have been concerned with the analogy of sport as work. They suggest that as sport becomes increasingly institutionalized, the hallmarks of athletic success are often the remuneration, status, prestige, responsibility and privilege accorded to individuals.

It is this objective external career approach that has received the most attention from sport researchers. For example, Rosenberg (1981) prefaces his "Sport as Work: Characteristics and Career Patterns" by noting that sport "has enough in common with the rest of the occupational structure to be ammenable to the analysis as an occupation" and concludes that a retirement model is quite satisfactory in such an analysis. Ogilvie and Howe (1981) consider pre-preparation for retiring athletes in order to smooth their subsequent entry into other occupations. McPherson's (1977) discussion of dual-careers for professional athletes concludes that during a playing career, maintaining another career outside of sport is generally impossible. In each of the examples, athletes are shown to have a career in sport, to leave sport and to pursue other occupations or careers.

The internal dimensions of career cycles are the stages and tasks as seen and experienced by individuals in careers (Schein, 1978). The research of McPherson (1980), Prus (1982) and Scott (1982) exemplifies this approach to athlete retirement. They independently propose career contingency models to denote a process oriented framework emphasizing the how and when of involvements and disinvolvements in sport roles. McPherson's account of career patterns and contingencies is, again, of professional athletes. He links athlete experience with adjustment after leaving. He reports that

> the career of the professional athlete is characterized by uncertainty; by upward, horizontal and downward mobility, by varying degrees of occupational prestige, by age grading; and by a unique lifestyle...All of these factors may subsequently influence the occupation and psychological adjustment to retirement from this short lived career. (McPherson, 1980: 129)

Prus (1982) provides an account of how athletes became disinvolved. He suggests that a shift in one's frame of reference, a change in self-identity, a reevaluation of the costs of involvement, the disappointment of competing and the inadequacy of relationships all mark the athlete's leaving process. Prus also discusses how athletes might become reinvolved. Scott (1982), borrowing largely from Prus' work, studied female basketball players' reasons for not retiring. These she named conversion, activity entanglements, embeddedness of social life, continuance commitment (dissuaded from quitting) and negotiation of reputation and identity. The career contingency approach is more flexible than the life course perspective in its accomodation of a variety of career patterns and is therefore one step removed from the linear advancement which characterizes male stream (external) careers (Wallace, 1982).

Dabrowski (1983: 30) posits that "a developmental framework for understanding (women's) work combines an objective assessment of the job movement with the subjective assessment of the career path". This notion of career path expands the career contingencies model of a particular role and is aligned with a definition of careers that accounts for the ongoing, dynamic and individualistic nature of women's lives. Hall (1984: 4) adopts Hansen and Repoza's (1978) definition as most acceptable for explaining careers; that of "...a time extending working out of a purposeful life pattern through work, paid and unpaid, undertaken by an individual". This can be easily adapted to the sport environment where the meaning of leaving high performance competition is likely to influence the successive patterns of women's careers.

The Social Gerontological Perspective

The third and most popular sociological approach to retirement is the social gerontological perspective. This perspective focuses on the social and cultural meaning of aging and the continuing search for a unified theoretical perspective for the social scientific study of the life cycle. Retirement, in this case, is most often viewed in a chronological context when age and productive capacities dictate that individuals withdraw (or are withdrawn) from a position or occupation (Webster, 1969). McPherson (1980) is among the first to suggest that this social gerontological approach might provide insight into how athletes leave high performance competition.

From such literature, six theories appear most prominantly in the research on sport retirement. They are disengagement theory, activity theory, continuity theory, social breakdown (or role loss) theory, exchange theory and social death theory. These theories currently shape our understanding of sport retirement and often help determine how further research is conducted. The social gerontological approach to retirement predates its appearance in the sport literature by approximately three decades. Since 1974 (Hill and Lowe), the sport retirement researchers have adopted many of these social gerontological concepts to construct their studies and have explained their results accordingly.

Disengagement theory (Cummings and Henry, 1961) was one of the first responses to the call for some new middle range theories specific to gerontology (Carp, 1972). This theory proposes that society and individuals mutually disengage from each other in order to minimize both the number of shared interactions and the trauma of the actual parting experience on society and the individuals concerned. Such disengagements are expressed in terms of reduction in activity and reduction of affective attachments to social objects. The societal demands for successive cohort groups to 'functionally perform' predicates societal disengagement. Individual withdrawal coincides with the inevitable decrease in personal functional ability and level of activity and an increase in 'anormativeness' (Binstock and Shanas, 1976) that is part of the process of aging. Optimal disengagement occurs when there is minimal disturbance to either the society or individuals upon departure. Disengagement is essentially a functionalist position whereby middle aged individuals establish an equilibrium oriented toward society and, after retirement (or similar life crisis), replace the equilibrium with a focus oriented toward themselves (Atchley, 1972: 32).

In sport, disengagement theory has been used to predict what Rosenberg (1981) refers to as 'happily retired athletes'. As these athletes leave competitive sport, younger and presumably more capable athletes can be automatically incorporated into the programs. In this manner, sport organizations rapidly 'fill the gaps' and departing athletes are free to increase their attention to other pursuits outside of the sport organization.

Disengagement theory has been heavily criticized for its inability to explain athletes who continue to remain involved in sport after they cease competing (Greendorfer, 1984); athletes who hang-on despite deteriorating skills (Rosenberg, 1981); returning athletes (Lerch, 1981); or athletes who are involuntarily retired through injury (McPherson, 1981) or team selection procedures (Gilroy, 1982).

More specific to retiring female athletes, the theory of disengagement may be appropriate for explaining those individuals who exhibit a significant decrease in sport involvement after retirement. However, it is assumed that both the nature and context of retirement experiences have an impact on how and under what conditions female athletes leave sport. Disengagement does not adequately explain retiring athletes who later return to sport in similar capacities or simply alter the manner of their participation (e.g., from high performance competitor to coach). Also, little is understood about the social network of sport and the effect of an individual's retirement on her subsequent interaction with such a network. Whether or not complete disengagement is seen to occur, it may be much more useful to think of disengagement in terms of either reduced activity or a reduction of affective attachments to social objects but not necessarily both.

Activity theory (Havighurst, 1957) was revived as a response to disengagement theory. It maintains that optimal retirement occurs when upon retiring individuals replace work roles with other roles so that overall activity levels are maintained. Matthews (1979) draws attention to the need for consideration of both the number and the quality of these roles as important to the adjustment of retiring individuals. In sport, this theory would suggest that a retiring athlete would replace the sport-hours with an equitable number (and quality) of other activity-hours. Activity theory appears to explain career changes from high performance sport to other equitable activities but is quite inadequate for explaining changes to either more or less demanding activities.

For high performance female athletes, activity theory is of dubious value. No empirical description has been completed on amateur female athletes' subsequent activities after sport retirement. Of the available anecdotal and journalistic accounts, much of the information concentrates on athletes who have not adjusted well (McPherson, 1980). The only known study on female professional athlete retirement (Allison, 1984) identifies a void or unoccupied time that athletes found difficult to fill. Although activity theory would suggest that optimal retirement occurs when such voids are filled, within a different framework optimal retirement could also be interpreted as a reduction in the intensity of activity to more comfortable (normal) levels. In this manner, not only might the replacement of the extraordinary activity level of competitive sport be impossible to achieve but it might well be considered undesirable. Further, it is difficult to imagine what activities could be described as equitable replacements for retiring female athletes. The activity hours and the quality of activities such as childbirth, career involvement, political activism and family life are essentially incomparable. Thus, activity theory remains contentious without descriptive information about retiring female athletes.

Continuity theory suggests that individuals "try to maintain continuity in lifestyle as they age" (Lerch, 1981: 140). Lofland (1978) centers her work on continuing transitional nature of roles. For example, she discusses the role of dying as transitional, irreversible and having no graduates (Lofland, 1978: 106). Entry into the dying role could be guarded by gatekeepers, regulated in passage and even awareness could be controlled. Lofland highlights the difficulty individuals experience in transitional roles where they frequently ask "How shall I act?", "What shall I do?" and "What does this mean?". In sport, retirement has only a partial finality about it since reinvolvement or restitution often seem possible. It is conceivable that continuity theory may be useful in explaining compulsory or involuntary sport retirement through the gatekeeping function. Athletes could, for example, in the case of injury, be introduced to the role of retirement by coaches, managers or sport physicians. Similarly, athletes could be prevented from retiring by gatekeepers such as contract agents, peers, and the media who continually reinforce the athletes' responsibility and commitment to perform. "Cooling out the mark" experiences could be similarly explained by continuity theory. In this example, athletes' passage through the retiring role could be managed and/or regulated by others (Gilroy, 1982). If such others are unidentified, athletes could even be initially unaware of their entry and progression along the path of retirement.

Lerch (1981) is a strong advocate of the use of continuity theory in sport retirement research. He identifies several continuity variables[4] and finds them positively related to retirement adjustment. He recognizes that other variables may be equally related to adjustment but affirms that they, too, could be understood in terms of continuity in lifestyle.

Continuity theory can be criticized for not accounting for those athletes who fail to continue with a meaningful life after retirement. Also, athletes who are "out of step" or in "disordered life patterns" (Seltzer, 1975) in sport may even find such continuity to be undesirable. Finally, the smoothness of the transition as the result of personal stability places the responsibility for maladjusted transitions onto individuals. In this way, the magnitude of the 'problem of athlete retirement' (McLaughlin, 1981a; 1981b) and the probable adjustment processes are effectively camouflaged.

To understand female athlete retirement through the continuity framework, it is essential to know something of how women become athletes, why they continue to be athletes and something of their adaptive abilities. Athletes who consistently adapt throughout their sport careers should cope well with retirement. However, since little is known about the experiences of high performance female athletes, it is difficult to anticipate how successful adaptation to life after competitive sport might be described. Additionally, if individuals are described as 'coping individuals', it must be asked "what are the reference or cohort groups of female athletes?" ; "...of veteran female athletes?". Evidently, continuity theory has limited potential for explaining female athlete retirement. It simply fails to explain the discontinuities assumed to exist between athletes and veteran athletes.

Social breakdown theory proposes that a role loss such as leaving competitive sport leads to social devaluation of personal status and skills. This, in turn, leads to further role loss. The interdependence between individuals and the social world functions so that once the cycle is initiated, "it serves to reinforce everyone's conception of incompetence, thereby ensuring even further difficulties" (Zusman, 1980 in Hendricks and

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[4] Variables such as educational level, positive pre-retirement attitudes, good health and present income were significant in his research.

Hendricks, 1981: 140). The eventual result of social breakdown is a 'rolelessness' or normlessness experienced by individuals who also experience greatly reduced self control of their personal behavior. Specific to sport, Rosenberg refers to retirement as a "viscious spiral of role definition, atrophy of skills and lowered self image" (Rosenberg, 1981: 4). The antidote for such a breakdown is called social reconstruction or the restoration of one's self-image (Kuypers and Bengston, 1973). To prevent this social breakdown, pre-retirement counselling about the inevitability of identity-change and the preparation and strategies for 'resuming a normal life' might be recommended. Rosenberg (1981) also suggested a more gradual phasing-out from sport with provisions for detraining to minimize the degree of social breakdown.

Social breakdown theory focuses on the separation of an athlete's life from the life after retirement and suggests that sport retirement seriously disrupts one's life. Neither the separation nor such serious disruption are consistently supported through research. To the contrary, Greendorfer's (1984) study illustrates that athletes continue their involvement in sport after retirement. She concludes that gradual shifts of interest prior to and during the transition into retirement reflect more of a shift in commitment over time rather than the serious life disruption presented in the social breakdown theory.

At this time, for female athletes, social disruption, role loss and social devaluation of skills and status are hypothetical constructs. How women would experience such social breakdown is unclear. Any social devaluation of skills and status may be less appropriate and less significant for women athletes than for their more socially acceptable and visible male compatriots. Also, it must be asked "under what circumstances would 'rolelessness' occur?" and "What would social reconstruction involve?". Social breakdown theory is a deterministic model which cannot account for female athletes who do not experience 'rolelessness', negative labeling, self-labeling as incompetent or dependence on external labeling. It may solely be useful in explaining the skill atrophy of female (and male) athletes. However, its explanatory utility is again seriously hindered by the lack of descriptive information about the nature of the female athlete experience.

Exchange theory attempts to explain that individuals have diminishing power and/or resources upon retirement. From the perspective of older people, balanced relationships may be regarded as dependent upon careful planning and management of limited resources (e.g., economical, social-familial and personal-physiological) so that individuals adjust to, as well as influence, their environment (Buckley, 1967). The exchange theory is reductionist but may be quite useful as an explanatory tool particularly in western cultures like Canada.

The potential and possible applications of exchange theory to the study of sport retirement remain largely unexplored. As an economic concept, exchange evokes an association of adversarial relationships between, for example, athletes and sport management; cost and benefit; supply and demand. In professional sport, Rosenberg illustrates just such an adversarial relationship in "the nature of athlete-management relations and the balance of power [which] must inevitably shift to management's favor as athletes age" (Rosenberg, 1981: 4). McPherson (1980: 134) describes the exchange and/or transfer of athletes' skills or knowledge to other occupations within the sport milieu. The applications of the exchange theory at present appear to accomodate only specific sectors of sport experience (i.e., professional sports, aging athletes and non-renewable resource situations).

"The ultimate test of good theory is its usefulness in organizing our thinking about and understanding of phenomena of interest" (Maddox and Wiley, 1976: 19). However, exchange theory provides more questions than explanations about how and under what conditions female athletes experience the leaving process. If athletic experiences can indeed be considered in terms of resources, just what resources do the high performance female athletes have? How do they plan and manage such resources? What is the exchange value of such resources? Do adversarial relationships exist between athletes and coaches (managers, etc.)? If so, are these relationships similar for both female and male athletes? Finally, what is the nature and value of resources female athletes have prior to and subsequent to sport retirement? At this time, exchange theory has probably the weakest explanatory potential of all six social gerontological theories discussed so far.

The final theory utilized with any degree of frequency in the sport retirement literature is that of *social death*, a concept stemming from recent studies in thanantology.[5] The linkage between sport retirement and death may seem far fetched, yet death is a form of transition (albeit final, irreversable and without graduates) which "takes place in a social context and gains meaning from that context" (Kalish, 1976: 483). Social death is closely related to the process of disengagement discussed earlier. From one perspective, the dying individual is considered to be fully adapted if she 'comes to accept' her impending death; i.e., the final stage of growth (Kubler-Ross, 1969). From another perspective, people in contact with a dying individual may regard such a person as 'socially dead' long before physical death. In this manner, when individuals are unable to perform expected functions or are socially stigmatized (are elderly, severely disabled or terminally-ill), others may begin to avoid and thereby isolate such individuals. In both situations, the 'dying' individual and the 'social others' are presumed to disengage. On the assumption that sport retirement is inevitable, the social death theory suggests that certain rituals, rules and announcements are necessary to 'mark the passage' of athletes.

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[5] Thanantology is the scientific study of death; its causes and and the phenomena (Onions, 1973: 2275).

The exemplar of the social death research related to sport retirement is the Rosenberg study (1982). Rosenberg likens sport death (retirement) to social death. He (1982: 2) suggests that "regardless of economic status, retirement is a status transition of considerable social and psychological stress for the athlete". He then employs the concept of social death to illustrate the dependency of athletes' social identity on consensual validation in promoting optimal retirement adjustment. Expression such as 'cut dead', 'sub-person', 'posting terminal rosters' and 'athletes last rites' are utilized by Rosenberg to focus on the decreasing consensual validation available to retiring athletes.

In this thanantological framework, the traditional rules and rituals for sport retirement are regarded as rational and legitimate ways for social disengagement to occur. Ball (1976) explores how 'failed athletes' retired from sport. He identifies degradation and cooling-out[6] as group reactions to a player who had failed. Lerch (1982), a gerontologist and sport sociologist, employs the psychological stages of progression for terminally-ill patients (Kubler-Ross, 1969a)[7] to examine sport career death; that is, the adjustment of individual athletes to impending termination. From the athletes' perspective, media-retiring is one approach to impending separation. For example, Lofland (1978: 71-72) uses 'media-dying' to illustrate the degree to which dying people may share information with the public media. This 'media-dying' bears striking resemblance to the media-retiring of some high profile athletes. Consider, for example, the 1976 Olympic gold medal decathlete, Bruce Jenner. Prior to the Olympic Games he publically declared his intention to retire. The corporate elite became interested in him (and his promised gold medal) for investment reasons. He then retired as planned with a number of publicity contracts waiting for his signature. Another example is that of a professional football player from Edmonton, Dave Fennell. He was not performing well in the training camps and the media took the lead and published articles about his 'impending retirement'. When he independantly announced his retirement, the public did not regard it as self-serving and in many ways he enhanced his personal credibility (The Edmonton Journal, May 15, 1984). Rosenberg (1982) suggests that such 'media-retiring' is considered in poor taste by the public if it is self-serving, in good taste if it is an honor unasked for and duly appreciated.

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[6] Degradation involves ignoring the player; a form of disengagement. Cooling-out is the extension of the sympathy and comfort by others to the athletes who are leaving and the acceptance of such by the athletes (Rosenberg, 1982: 7).

[7] Kubler-Ross (1969a) identifies the stages of terminally-ill patients as shock and denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally, acceptance.

Like dying, leaving competitive sport may also include physical and emotional pain, loss of others, inability to function in familiar ways and the ascribed role of being a retiring person. However, whether female athletes mark the passage in such a manner is unknown. There is virtually no mention of women athletes in the research of Rosenberg (1982), Lerch (1982) and Ball (1976). Explanations of high performance female athlete retirement using concepts such as traditional rules and rituals, consensual validation and media-retiring remain pure conjecture and speculation at this time.

These six gerontological theories represent the attempts to link social gerontological theory and sport retirement. To some researchers, the link is promising, notably Lerch (1981; 1982), Rosenberg (1981; 1982) and McLaughlin (1981a; 1981b) while to others, it is problematic: Svoboda and Vanek (1981), Rigauer (1980), Prus (1982) and Scott (1982). Still others move between perspectives, unwilling to fully adopt any single approach (Ogilvie and Howe, 1981; McPherson, 1977; McPherson, 1980). It is clear however that no single theory adequately explains sport retirement.

The social gerontological theories have all been adopted from concepts of aging and/or dying. The comparison of circumstances surrounding sport retirement to those of a final occupational retirement or death rests on tenuous ground. This is primarily because outcomes from sport retirement are considerably different from occupational retirement or death. Also, the overall consequence of sport retirement on one's life is likely to be much less significant than similar entries into occupational retirement or dying passage. Finally, social others are in a position to respond much more seriously to retiring or dying individuals than to athletes leaving sport. Thus, in gerontological theories, there is little recognition given to the differences between sport retirement and other forms of retirement or dying transitions (Greendorfer, 1984).

Social gerontological theories generally highlight the necessity for adjustment and/or replacement in 'life after sport'. In some research, pre-preparation for retirement is recommended to ease such adjustments. In other research, exchange or replacement of the sport experience with other activities of equal value are suggested. In all of the social gerontological theories, athletes are assumed to progress in quite rigid or fixed order through the retirement experience and little emphasis is placed on the effect of unique experiences upon individual need for adaptation in subsequent life stages or experiences.

Until there are adequate descriptions of how women experience the leaving process from competitive sport, the utility of any of the social gerontological theories cannot be established. In many of the theories, the references to male, professional athletes predominate. The studies which include women as respondents are few (Greendorfer, 1984; Gilroy, 1982; Brown, 1984; Allison and Myers, 1984; Werthner-Bales, 1985) and in each instance, these authors assume a critical position with regard to the social gerontological perspective. Greendorfer (1984) is critical of the inability of the disengagement theory to explain both continued sport involvement of athletes after retirement and the lack of trauma or crisis in some women athletes' experience; she studied university athletes. Gilroy (1982) examines high school female athletes' involuntary disengagement through team selection procedures. Brown's 1984 study concentrates on young age-class female and male swimmers and their reasons for either staying or leaving competitive swimming. Allison and Myers (1984) is the only existing study on the retirement of female professional athletes (tennis players). They challenge both continuity and exchange theories to explain the 'void' and/or the sense of relief expressed by professional female tennis players upon retirement. Werthner-Bales (1985) examines twenty-eight male and female Olympic athletes in Canada primarily to identify factors influencing the transition out of sport careers. One of the factors, a new focus, offers limited support for activity theory. Another factor, a sense of accomplishement, partially supports both the social breakdown theory and disengagement theory. Although Werthner-Bales is the first author to attempt to describe the transition from high performance sport, she is unable to rely completely on any single gerontological theory. Thus, although each of the social gerontological theories has some limited explanatory potential with respect to high performance female athlete retirement, they seem to be much more useful for generating questions, as yet unanswered, about the nature and circumstances of how women experience sport retirement.

C. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

From the preceding discussion it is evident that the application of social theory to an explanation of how athletes retire from sport is less than satisfactory. Moreover, an investigation of each of the sociological approaches has revealed that none is fully capable of explaining female athlete retirement. Considered together, they remain unconvincing.

The predominant concerns fall into five major areas. First, there is an obvious lack of appropriate theoretical development which is able to explain fully female athlete retirement. The use of the life course perspective, career development cycles and/or the social gerontological approaches to study such retirement undoubtedly leads to distortion or misrepresentation of women's experiences as athletes and as women leaving high performance sport. Without appropriate theory, there can be little coordination in data collection on new and exciting areas such as the leaving processes of high performance female athletes. Also, in reverse, there can be no appropriate theory until there has been systematic attention paid to the collection and presentation of data. Finding neither appropriate theory nor systematic empirical descriptions of female sport retirement, this study will begin in somewhat of a theoretical vacuum.

The second point is lack of a dynamic and historical approach in the research on high performance female athletes. The potential of the research enterprise is severely limited when examination is made only of slices of experience as separate from the context and biography of high performance female athletes. In this way, a review of the research illustrates the prevalence of retirement events under examination rather than retirement passages or transitions. Although some sport sociologists have expended efforts in the direction of understanding the transition or process of retiring (Prus, 1982; Scott, 1982; Lerch, 1981; McPherson, 1982), many others concentrate on the retirement event itself (Rosenberg, 1982; McPherson, 1977; Ogilvie and Howe, 1981; Noonen, 1981). Also, experience such as the intermittent nature of some individual sport involvements and retirements or the possibility of retiring over an extended period of time remain unaccounted for. Thus, the retirement experience within the context of the sport situation needs thorough examination. Further, in order to understand fully how and under what conditions female athletes leave sport, the context of their life events and relationships needs to be considered. At this time, the study of retiring athletes as individuals in transition and within the context of social life has received only cursory attention (Greendorfer, 1984). Biographies including such information as athletes' priorities, experiences and shifts of interest over time appear essential. In this study, an attempt will be made to understand the leaving experiences as the athletes relate them, within the context of both the sport situation and their ongoing lives.

Third, consider the common assumptions underlying the life course career development and social gerontological approaches to athlete retirement. One assumptuon is that of linearity. Athletes' sport experiences are generally considered as linear progressions along a single sport path that is landmarked by successes and failures [1]. Progress is believed to be made along amateur and then professional standings. The reverse is believed to be regressive and virtually impossible within the same sport. In this way, athletes are believed to progress in only one direction along their sport paths. The assumption of linearity is reflected in the concepts of irreversibility, inevitability and finality that frequently appear in the sport retirement literature. Until more is known about the actual paths of competitive experience as female athletes describe it, and about the social and cultural meanings of sport for such athletes, the assumption of linearity permits the examination of sport retirement along only the narrowest of possible dimensions.

Another assumption is that athletes generally retire from sport rather than from a specific sport experience. This assumption of generality makes it difficult to explore the retirement of athletes who are highly successful in more than one sport[9] or those who go on to become sport administrators, managers, officials and volunteers.

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[1] This is similar to the linear-success achievement model of career described by Bailyn (in Wallace, 1982: 45- 58).

A third assumption in all three sociological approaches is that of trauma, that is, that "serious life disruption" occurs. The thread running through the research suggests that sport retirement is traumatic and athletes should prepare (or be prepared by sport organizations) to successfully (or optimally) negotiate the crisis and subsequently become adjusted to "life after sport". By way of a self-fulfilling prophesy, athletes may expect a serious life disruption, experience what is expected and subsequently adjust. However, alternative explanations need to be sought which allow for a more careful examination of specific sport settings, the entirety of sport experience and the interacting events and relationships of female athletes as they retire.

These assumptions of linearity, generality and trauma of retirement may all prove quite erroneous when more becomes known specifically about the experiences of high performance female athletes leaving competitive sport.

The fourth point to consider is the unnecessary complexity of terminology in the sport retirement literature. This complexity can be illustrated in several ways; by diversity of meanings for retirement, by the usage of a wide range of similar terms to refer to such transitions, and by the unquestioned acceptance of work / sport retirement similarities.

With regard to the diversity of meanings, the life course perspective views retirement as one of many crises which individuals encounter as they progress through successive developmental stages. The responsibility for optimal negotiation (in a normative manner) resides with the individual athletes in transition. However, the career development approach principally regards retirement as the final stage in an occupational life cycle. If athletes' sport involvement is likened to a single career, then sport retirement could logically be just such a stage. However, if the definition of a career is a more dynamic one, comprising the "time extended working out" of life patterns (Hall, 1984), then athletes' sport retirement could just as readily be considered as one of many experiences which together form a sport career. In this way, retirement from competitive sport is exclusively dependent upon the definition chosen for a sport career.

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[9] One fine example of this is Susan Holloway, an international and Olympic competitor for Canada in both cross-country skiing and kayaking. Another is Sylvia Burka, a national team speed skater and later, a cyclist.

Prus (1982) advances "disinvolvement" as part of the "career of a role", in this case, the role of an athlete. This conceptualization of retirement as disinvolvement may prove useful but the relationship between 'athlete disinvolvement', athlete careers and athlete retirement needs greater examination. In the social gerontological approach, retirement is linked with chronological age and decreasing productive capacity. However, the assumption of similarity between sport retirement and occupational retirement (or social death) is empirically unsubstantiated and currently somewhat dubious. Gerontological theory attempts to explain the social and cultural meanings of aging and dying. In the context of sport, retiring athletes must somehow be regarded as aging and dying athletes who are progressively less capable of performing athletic tasks. Such diversity of meanings for the fundamental term *retirement* remains problematic for studies in athlete retirement.

To further complicate the term retirement, a number of synonyms have appeared in the research. Retirement has been called disinvolvement (Prus, 1982; Scott, 1982), disengagement (Cumming and Henry, 1961), rite of passage (Lofland, 1978), role transition (Seltzer, 1976) and status passage (Glaser and Strauss, 1971). The sport literature is also rife with dissimilar descriptors refering to sometimes very similar ideas. For example, McPherson (1977) uses voluntary and involuntary retirement. Both Patrikkson (1984) and Brown (1984) study dropping out, a form of involuntary retirement. Gilroy (1982) studied 'cooling-out' and 'cutting', forms of involuntary retirement. Ogilvie and Howe (1981) studied 'career termination', unconnected with either of McPherson's earlier labels. As Lofland (1984:3) succinctly states, the study of [sport] retirement is "a terminological jungle where many labels compete and the command of a single label is short lived."

Another concern about the terminology is the apparent acceptability of the conceptual linkage between work/retirement and sport/retirement. Retirement is an inclusive term used by sport sociologists to describe all manners of leaving sport. Such terminology corresponds with other jargon of sport which makes explicit use of terms such as careers, occupations, jobs, work-life expectancy and productivity. In doing so, similarities and possible connections between sport and work and their respective retirements are inevitable (Rigauer, 1981:78)[10]. In spite of this, similarities between work retirement and sport retirement may be relatively superficial. In sport, for example, athletes are presumed to leave competitive sport closer to their mid-life rather than late-life. This would suggest that perhaps career-change or sport-transition could be considered as appropriate expressions for leaving sport. Further, the sport-life expectancy and number of productive years for an athlete are normally compressed into a few short but intense seasons rather than the forty to forty-five working years attributed to the average adult male (Rosenberg, 1981)[11]. Also, the years after competitive sport are not generally considered as post-productive years even though later work may no longer be in the sport environment. Therefore, the apparent acceptability of the retirement terminology in sport seems quite dependent on this minimal sport and work-life similarity.

Thus, it seems essential to establish a more consistent terminology which is reflective of the leaving experience from sport. Progressions from life stage to life stage, from career to alternative careers (or retirement) or from living to dying (or death) appear as possible analogies to the study of athlete retirement. Also, when little is known about how athletes talk about leaving sport, imposing a language filled with symbolic references to work, retirement, career-change or death necessarily reduce the potential for an accurate description or explanation of the leaving process by athletes or researchers. Also, when different language is used by different authors in sport to express decidedly similar ideas, some streamlining would appear desirable. Therefore, the retirement terminology must be regarded cautiously by the sport sociologists until more is known about the transitions which athletes, and in particular, female athletes experience. This study will attempt to 'shed light' on the intricacies of how high performance female athletes talk about leaving sport.

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[10] Rigauer (1981: 92) wrote that "one of the most important functions of the ideologies of sport seems to consist of covering-up the work-like structures of sport". It is not clear, at this time, whether that is how athletes perceive sport or whether the analysis is exterior to the athletes. Amateur athletes may well differ from professional athletes in this regard.

[11] The length of a woman's working life is difficult to ascertain. If work is considered as only paid labor, Armstrong and Armstrong (1982) report that over 60% of all women in Canada had paid jobs in 1980; a working majority. However, Wilson (1982: 98) reported that women's work histories are characteristically discontinuous. No figures are readily available on the working years attributed to the average adult female. Of course, too, if work were considered as home labour and paid labor (reproductive and productive labor) then women's work is ongoing throughout their lives.

The fifth concern about the existing sociological approaches to sport retirement is the omission of women from the majority of the research. A review of the literature reveals a heavy concentration on male athletes as research subjects and frequently proceeds to generalize research results to include all athletes. [11]

Most of the literature refers only obliquely to female athletes, if, indeed, reference is made at all. As early as 1977 for example, McPherson wrote that there had been "no empirical studies of former female athletes (e.g., golf, tennis players) and few studies of former elite (e.g., Olympic) athletes" (McPherson, 1977: 3). By 1981, Svoboda and Vanek were calling for special studies of women athletes: "some figures in [their] results suggest that a special study should be dedicated to problems of women athletes in coherence with their motivation to sport and retirement circumstances" (Svoboda and Vanek, 1981: 20).

At the present time, there are very few studies on the retirement of female athletes. There has been a single study on the retirement of female professional tennis players (Allison and Myers, 1984). Using a sample of twenty retired athletes and an informant, their work focuses on three sets of data, expectations that players recalled upon entering tennis, perceptions of their competitive years and the most and least enjoyable experiences. Among the results, they note that the athletes' primary reasons for retirement were frustration and travel and their first responses to retirement were relief and isolation. However, after some time had passed, the responses to retirement became satisfaction, acceptance and stablity and sense of failure. Such data greatly emphasizes the need for research on both retirement and the context of retirement within the broader life patterns of the athletes.

Concerning amateur athletes, there have been several studies on younger female athletes leaving sport (Gilroy, 1982; Patrikkson, 1984 and Brown, 1984) and one study has been done on how collegiate athletes leave varsity competition (Greendorfer, 1984). Gilroy's research examines the involuntary disengagement of Canadian high school athletes from representative school teams. She finds that recruitment and selection procedures greatly influence how athletes adapt to their disengagement. Patrikkson (1984) studies drop-out rates in Swedish youth sport programs.[13] He finds that drop-outs could be described as those who altered their club participation from formal to informal levels; those whose primary involvement as athletes changes to a secondary involvement (e.g., junior coach, volunteer organizer); and those who partially drop-out of some activities but remain involved in one or more others. He also identifies 'turn over' (where athletes may leave one sport but join another) as the reason for some drop-out figures. This illustrates that what may appear as 'athlete retirement' may in some cases be just as adequately viewed as organizational turn over or even as increasing individual specialization. Patrikkson's work is thus invaluable for addressing some of the less superficial dimensions of leaving sport, i.e., the formality, centrality and the degree of separation from both organizational and individual perspectives.

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[11] See for example, Hill and Lowe (1974), Miller (1978) and Svoboda and Vanek (1981). The latter recognize the need for studies with women subjects. Also, generalizing across not only gender but age, culture and/or sports is problematic (Svoboda and Vanek, 1981). These male subjects have generally been athletes or former athletes with professional sport histories (Mihovilovic, 1969; Svoboda and Vanek, 1981); primarily is baseball, hockey, football, boxing and soccer (c.f. Greendorfer, 1984).

Brown (1984), studies the factors influencing the retirement of 404 age-class swimmers. She finds that attrition rates are due to the negative aspects of organized sport and factors such as role constellations and lifestyle outside of the sport milieu. She identifies a pattern of dramatically decreasing involvement of adolescent girls in progressive age-group categories and concludes that although gender-role stereotypes bear little relation to withdrawal roles, significant others, self identity and commitment to sport roles appear important to the examination of such involvement patterns. Brown's research is an excellent example of accounting for both context of the sport situation and the ongoing lives of athletes.

Greendorfer (1984) studies American female and male intercollegiate athletes[14] and analyzes responses on the basis of continuity and continuation of behavior; transition or process of leaving sport; gradual shifts of priorities (importance of sport and competing/alternative interests); and retirement as a minor rather than severe adjustment. She concludes that it is important to distinguish between leaving sport and transitions from other experiences, e.g., leaving college. Also, she submits that the results from the research on male professional athletes have not adequately reflected the experiences of female athletes, that no empirical descriptions of problems women experience in leaving sport are available and that the language of social gerontology may not be the most appropriate for the examination of athletes leaving sport. Greendorfer's presentation of the theoretical and empirical considerations of athlete retirement is an enormous contribution to studying retirement as situated in previous life experience and as a process encompassing a chain of life long experiences (Greendorfer, 1984).

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[13] Youth sport programs accomodated female and male individuals between the ages of 12 and 16 years in sport club activitites.

[14] A total of 427 male athletes from 1970-1980 'Big 10' teams and 697 female athletes from various intercollegiate teams from 1976-1982 responded to a fixed alternative and open-ended questionnaire.

There has been only one study on high performance athletes' transitions out of sport careers. Werthner-Bales (1985) examines equal numbers of male and female Olympic medalists or those ranked in the top six in individual events or top half of the field in team events. Through a fixed, open-ended interview schedule, she identifies seven factors which in combination influence the transition out of sport careers. These are a new focus, a sense of accomplishment, coaching, injuries or health problems, politics and sport association problems, finances and support of family and friends. Werthner-Bales, a two time Olympian in track and field, is the only researcher to account for athletes' specific feelings and behaviours about retirement, reasons for retirement and factors influencing a transition out of sport careers.

However, despite the fine beginnings of Gilroy, Patrikkson, Brown, Greendorfer and Werthner-Bales, there are apparently no studies published specifically on how and under what conditions retirement of high performance 'amateur' athletes occurs. The limited research attention to the experiences of female athletes and the virtual absence of investigations about high performance female athlete retirement are illustrative of the general omission of women from the development of sport retirement theories. Gender is a characteristic relevant to research on leaving high performance sport. If attention is not paid to the gender of high performance athletes, then the research may be gender blind. Ultimately, this leads to the misrepresentation of women's experience as athletes and as women leaving high performance sport.

From this discussion, it is evident that sport sociology continues to have difficulty coming to terms with gender. In some cases, women's experience is simply absent. In others, it is misrepresented or misconstrued. Despite the considerable rhetoric about women athletes, their very real, authentic experiences remain invisible, unexplored and unexplained.

D. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

From the expressed concerns about retirement theories, that is, the lack of appropriate theoretical development, the ahistorical and static approach, the unnecessay complexity of terminology and the regretable omission of women, the present study is being developed to explore the leaving process specifically of female athletes. It is the intention of this research to describe and explain how such a leaving process is experienced by high performance female athletes in Canada.

This study has several goals:

1. to describe the leaving process as it is recalled by high performance female athletes;
2. to explain the leaving process through the subjective interpretations provided by women's own definitions and explanations of such experience and
3. to explain the leaving process in the context of the ongoing lives of women athletes.

The proposed study is seen as filling a large gap in the literature on athlete retirement. It is also viewed in terms of making a contribution to the theoretical understanding of sport career development among female athletes.

E. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This research is concerned generally with the lack of appropriate theory and data, and in particular with the void in the research literature about women leaving high performance sport. The major research question for this study is: "How and under what conditions is the leaving process in sport experienced by high performance female athletes?". More specifically, the examination of the leaving process will begin by addressing such questions as:

1. How can leaving be described?
2. How and when is leaving initiated?
3. What strategies are used during leaving; after leaving is complete?
4. How is leaving anticipated? How is the completion of leaving anticipated?

5. How do athletes control or influence leaving?
6. What conditions influence athletes during leaving; after leaving is complete?
7. Generally, how can women's leaving experiences from high performance sport best be described?

The focus of these research questions is drawn from a preliminary [15] study and is considered as a useful starting point.

Given that the relations between individual biography and sport history[16] are essential to explanations of how athletes leave sport, this study concentrates on a search for empirical data about the nature of the leaving experiences and the context in which they occur. This approach is an exploratory one. Chapter two provides a detailed discussion of the procedures and methods used in addressing the central questions of the study.

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[15] A preliminary study conducted between October, 1983 and July, 1984 consisted of in-depth interviews with seven 1976 female Olympic athletes. The purpose of the study was twofold; to establish appropriate interview questions for this research and to formulate and put into place, the data analysis procedures.

[16] Biography refers to the history of the lives of individual women while history refers to a written narative constituting a continuous, time-ordered record of important sport events in Canada.

II. CHAPTER TWO: DATA COLLECTION AND PLAN OF ANALYSIS

A. INTRODUCTION

This research is based on data collected from the Canadian female athletes of the 1976 Olympic Team. In accordance with the stated goals of this research, to describe and explain the leaving process and to document the relation between leaving and the ongoing lives of Canadian female high performance athletes, the major although not exclusive emphasis has been on qualitative research techniques.

The basic research design consists of both a survey and in-depth interviews. First, contact had to be established with the female athletes and basic factual information was required. A mailed survey early in 1985 accomplished both purposes and resulted in completed questionnaires from 70 of the athletes. Following this, in-depth interviews with selected athletes were conducted and transcripts prepared. Content analysis was used to explore linkages between datum and therefore assist in describing how and under what conditions high performance female athletes leave competitive sport. Problems encountered during the analysis of the data were addressed in a manner consistant with qualitative research. That is, priority was always given to the athletes' use of language and to the accuracy and authenticity of interview data. Every effort was made to ensure that the information about the leaving experiences of the athletes was presented in the context of their lives as athletes and as social individuals.

B. BASIC RESEARCH DESIGN

Although a survey instrument was used in this study, the overall approach to the research question is qualitative. Before accounting for how both a survey and in-depth interviewing were used to gather data, the choice of an overall qualitative approach requires elucidation.

> Briefly, qualitative methodology is comprised of those research methods which assist social scientists to interpret subjective versions of reality that individuals create through experience and interaction with others. The researcher's personal conceptual framework is regarded as an integral portion of this research process; as the sensitizing structure from which the interpretation and integration of grounded data into new concepts, theories or empirical findings are made. Where conventional positivistic research generally incorporates theory-based hypotheses to be tested within immutable research designs, qualitative research depends upon the intuitive grasp of the researcher and her ability to actively locate raw data in the field

> of inquiry from which social theory is to be constructed. Understandings which emerge from such research are considered the product of interaction between the researcher and the phenomena under study. For the qualitative research investigation, this interaction is particularly apparent to and salient for the researcher (Turner, 1981: 228).
>
> Of the social science research concerned specifically with theory construction, The Discovery of Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) presents the most extensive use of raw data for the generation of substantive and formal theory [17]. They contend that the development of 'grounded theory' is more than an alternative. Rather, it is the primary research design from which theory can be generated. (Kirby, 1985:27-28)

This concurs with the approach taken in this particular research. The best source of data about how female athletes leave high performance sport is, logically, the athletes themselves. To go beyond description into an explanation of the leaving process of these athletes, it is essential to develop theory from such data. Thus, the interested sport sociologist is presented with the unique opportunity, indeed the obligation, to study the leaving process at the initial data gathering stage and to commence the generation of grounded theory through methods such as those presented by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

As the following review of data collection and procedures for analysis will clarify, the combination of survey *fact-gathering* and interview *meaning-gathering* allows the data to be more firmly grounded than would be possible with a single method.

C. DATA COLLECTION: THE SURVEY

The statistical or demographic data were gathered through a mailed questionnaire. This study focussed on one distinct population of high performance female athletes, those who were members of the 1976 Olympic Team which represented Canada at the summer Olympics in Montreal. Preliminary research had revealed that the athletes were reasonably accessible and had experience with the leaving process.

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[17] Substantive theories are developed for a substantive or empirical area of sociological inquiry. Formal theory is developed for formal or conceptual areas of sociological inquiry. Glaser and Strauss indicate that theory must still be able to assist is a) the production and explanation of behavior, b) the theoretical advance of sociology, c) the provision of a perspective on behavior (a stance on the data), d) the provision of and a guide for a style of research on particular areas of behavior and e) the understanding of practical situations (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 3).

Description of the Population

Female athletes from the 1976 Canadian Olympic Team were considered as the population for this study. The population was particularly suitable for me, the researcher, to study because of several factors. First, I have good connections with a number of the athletes because of my own membership on the 1976 Olympic Team and also, I was familiar with the sport lives of many of those athletes. Further, the uniqueness of the 1976 athletes indicated that they have a variety of leaving experiences over the nine years between 1976 and the year of data collection, 1985. With the limited time and financial constraints of the study, the 1976 athletes were thought to be the most available and appropriate population to study.

Second, without doubt, these women are top female athletes. As Olympic competitors, they reached the very highest calibre of participation. Therefore, in the study of how and under what conditions female athletes leave high performance sport, they were eminently qualified as high performance athletes.

Third, by limiting the population to those athletes, it was possible to use shared experience as their common denominator. Their Olympic status attested to their international competitive experience and also ensured sufficient time (1976 - 1985) to think about leaving, be in the process of leaving and/or to have left competitive high performance sport.[11]

Fourth, without question, there was enough variability in the population to gather information about leaving patterns. Preliminary documentation on the 1976 Olympic athletes had shown a variety of what may be termed as 'leaving patterns'. These appeared to include women who anticipated leaving before reaching their athletic potential; left immediately after their athletic potential was reached; experienced a short anticipatory period before leaving; were leaving; had left; were 'taking time off'; and were 'making a come-back'. The preliminary research also indicated that Olympic years (1976, 1980 and 1984) had been landmark 'transition years' when disproportionately large numbers of athletes left competitive sport. It was unclear just when the 1976 athletes left high performance competitive sport and whether the landmark 'transition years' formed part of their experiences.

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[11] Other national team athletes were deemed inappropriate for the purposes of this study. National team athletes in non-Olympic years or in non-Olympic sports characteristically experience unique sport travel patterns, financial support and recognition as high performance athletes. Also, age-class and special population national teams were likely to have a wide variety of leaving experiences, perhaps more closely linked with their age and 'specialness' than was desirable for this study. Other Olympic athletes from prior to or after 1976 were also considered inappropriate for this particular study. Athletes prior to 1976 proved to be exponentially more difficult to locate (e.g., 1972, 1968, 1964...). In comparison, those from 1980 were easier to locate but actually did not participate in Olympic competition because of the Boycott of the Moscow Games. Their unique experiences deserved an independent study quite distinct from the present research. Olympic athletes from 1984 were expected to have considerably less experience with the leaving process than did the 1976 athletes. Thus, other Olympic athletes and athletes from non-Olympic national teams have, for a variety of reasons were excluded from this particular study.

The rationale for including a variety of patterns of actual leaving rests in the belief that each athlete was in some unique position in the leaving process and that individual experiences, even in thin 'slices of time' (i.e., during a single interview) would contribute to the richness and depth of the collected data. Certain facts can be ascertained about, for example, when athletes leave high performance sport but this research needs to gather data on the meaning of those facts to the athletes who experienced them. Therefore, the term 'leaving pattern' was developed as a sensitizing concept for the researcher which refers to both the timing and circumstances of leaving high performance sport.

Procedures Employed in Locating Respondents

This study of high performance female athletes required some unconventional techniques for locating the athletes. First, there was a listing of the 1976 Olympic Team located in the 1976 Team Handbook of Canadian Athletes (COJO, 1976)[19] However, the problem of identifying the athletes was not so easily resolved. My familiarity with the team members and the manner in which the Official Team Handbook was originally produced was useful at this time for identifying the inaccuracies in the lists. The Official Team Handbook lists 134 female competitors. However, last minute changes to the team rosters were not included. Also, there was an inconsistancy regarding the inclusion of 'spares' on the team rosters. For example, three spares who did not compete were listed for Rowing but a player who was named as a spare and actually competed in Basketball did not appear in the Official Team Handbook. These listing problems made it difficult to establish a final list of competitors. The criteria for this study was the listing of the Official Team Handbook modified by the addition of others who actually competed but were not officially listed.

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[19]. Hereinafter, this is referred to as the Official Team Handbook.

Second, many athletes had changed residences and/or surnames since the 1976 Olympics. Addresses obtained from the Sport Governing Bodies were in some instances four or five address changes behind the athletes. A reliance on the more permanent addresses of the parents and anticipation that the mail would be forwarded to the athletes was developed. For name changes, the network of team contacts was relied upon. Contacted athletes were asked to help locate the whereabouts and name-changes of their former teammates. This snowballing technique involved the circulation of a list of 'difficult to locate' athletes and a request for athletes to add the missing information if possible. Several athletes lived outside of Canada. Not infrequently, mail was returned because the Post Office would not forward Canadian mail to a new address listing outside of Canada. Also, the potential for active participation of those athletes living in other countries was limited. Questionnaires received from outside Canada were included in the study.

Addresses were obtained for 124 of the 134 athletes finally identified as members of the research population. Although many attempts were made to secure accurate addresses, 14 questionnaires were returned as undeliverable. Of the 110 mailed, 70 were returned completed. This is a return rate of 64%.

Focussed interviews were conducted with 30 of the 70 respondents to the questionnaire. The criteria for narrowing the theoretical pool of 134 to a manageable group of 30 were the following: contactability (110 delivered questionnaires), responsiveness (70 respondents to the questionnaire), willingness (69 indicated they were willing to be interviewed) and geographic location (those located near or in cities where the researcher could travel). Further, two practical criteria were responsible for a further reduction of the pool of respondents. These were the athletes' leaving patterns (as determined by year of leaving) and Olympic sport. In all, these six criteria provided a sampling method to narrow the pool of appropriate interviewees. Variability of leaving patterns became the seventh and deciding criterion.

All but two athletes contacted for interviewing were able to arrange to meet the researcher. Barring the lack of ability to coordinate a meeting time, only one athlete agreed to an interview but subsequently seemed hesitant about freeing time for research. This may be interpreted either as reluctance on the part of the athlete or a simple inability to meet the time constraints of the travelling researcher. The other was interviewed by another researcher on a similar topic and was no longer considered as an appropriate candidate for interviewing.

As stated, the number of athletes interviewed finally was thirty. Also, three of the athletes were interviewed a second time. Single or one-time interviews appeared most appropriate for capturing the experiences of athletes who were in relatively stable leaving postures at the proposed time of interviewing. This included, for example, athletes contacted before they were seriously considering their own retirement and athletes recalling personal retirement long after the occurance. Repeated interviews were indicated for those athletes currently 'in transition'. Thus, single interviews were conducted with athletes from whom a second interview was unlikely to reveal new information. Repeated interviews were conducted with athletes who were likely to respond differently as time passed.

The number of interviews is considered more than adequate for data gathering in research of this nature. In order to maintain the quality of the athlete experiences, research concentration was on focussed interviews with a relatively small sample. A sample size smaller than 30 was considered inadequate to verify those claims achieved with theoretical saturation. A larger sample size was considered impractical and not additionally useful. Not only would the data management problems have been exponentially more difficult and unwieldly (Lofland, 1971:91), but also, the sample size may be limited for theoretical reasons. Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Miller (1984) suggest that little new information can be gained from over twenty-five interviews. This theoretical saturation was evidenced in this research when latter interviewees introduced variations of expressions and experiences presented by earlier interviewees. For those practical and theoretical reasons, the sample size of 30 is considered adequate for the purposes of this research. Although problems in sampling were present, this study proceeded, often seizing whatever opportunity was available to interview or to further contact female athletes. This convenient sampling is considered as a legitimate alternative since there was no intent to statistically generalize from the present data of the 1976 female athletes, beyond that population.

Survey Analysis

The overall goal of the questionnaire was to collect the most complete data possible about the high performance athletes in the most economical manner. The respondents are known to be located virtually all across Canada and a few abroad. The athletes' addresses were located as follows: Vancouver and Victoria area (33), Edmonton and Calgary (10), Saskatoon (5), Winnipeg (5), Toronto and area (25), Ottawa (9), Montreal and area (22) and Halifax (5). In addition, eight were known to be in other countries and addresses for thirteen athletes have not yet been found. It is clear that gathering data such as sport history, education, social and family constellations, paid and unpaid work experience and so on could only efficiently be accomplished through mailed surveys. Further, the questionnaire provided space for athletes to indicate if (and when) they have left, were leaving and/or had given considerable thought to leaving high performance competitive sport. There was also a space for comments on present involvement in sport, willingness to be interviewed at a later time, and further comments about either format or content.

The questionnaire was translated into French by a qualified translater so that it was available in the mother tongue of the athletes as determined by their registrations with their national sport governing bodies. Following this, an introductory letter to inform the athletes about the nature of the study, the identity of the researcher, their selection as respondents, a brief overall research schedule and the promise of confidential treatment of any information garnered through the questionnaires was placed with the appropriate questionnaire in a research package. Athletes were asked to return the completed questionnaire as soon as possible. The questionnaire is located in Appendix A.

GENERAL POPULATION ANALYSIS

The survey of the population reveals that of the 70 athletes (64%) who responded to the questionnaire, the great majority (95%) had left high performance sport by 1985, the time frame for the study. The demographic data shows that the athletes vary from the same-aged (approximate) cohort of the female Canadian population on the following: they are more likely (a) to live in western Canada rather than elsewhere and in urban rather than rural centers, (b) to be english speaking, (c) to be single and from larger than average families of-origin, (d) to be better educated although with delayed diplomas or degrees, and (e) to have delayed work histories. In order to demonstrate how different the athletes are from the general population, comparisons are made using the 1981 Census of Canada.

First, consider (a), the location of the athletes. Of the 70 respondents to the questionnaire, 7 (10%) live outside of Canada (U.S.A., England and Switzerland), 24 in British Columbia, 19 in Ontario, 11 in Alberta, 4 in Quebec, 2 in Manitoba, and one each in New Brunswick, North West Territories and Nova Scotia. The Canadian Census (1981) shows a much different distribution of women across Canada. Of particular import, of the 10.7 million women (over 15), 3.7 million live in Ontario, 3.1 million live in Quebec, 1.2 million live in British Columbia and 0.9 million live in Alberta. A superficial view of the questionnaire responses shows that British Columbia has a disproportionately large number of athletes responding while Quebec has a disproportionately low number of athletes responding. This is partly due to the number of addresses available for athletes from those provinces. It is also reflective of the original provincial representation on the 1976 Olympic Team. Further, almost all live in urban rather than rural centers. Of those who did indicate rural addresses, follow up showed that they essentially reside in small communities which facilitate sports such as riding (equestrain) and archery.

Second, consider (b), the language of the respondents. If mother tongue is considered as either of the two official languages, then 62 athletes (89%) converse basically in English. Only 8 (11%) converse in French. The ratio of English to French speaking is about 9:1. According to the Canadian Census (1981) the national ratio of English to French speaking women is about 2.4:1[10] Again, it is clear that there are a disproportionate number of English speaking women among the respondents to the survey and among the original team members.

Third, in (c), athletes are more likely to be single and to be from larger than average familes of origin. With regard to marital status, striking differences between the athletes and the general Canadian population are evident. However, some clarifying definitions are needed to provide a more equal ground for comparison. The conventional definitions provided by the Census of Canada (1981) are the following: *Single* is considered as women who have never married and persons whose marriage has been annulled; *Now Married* in this study refers to women whose husband is living unless the couple is either separated or divorced; *Separated* is women who have parted from their (spousal) partner; and *Divorced* is women who have obtained a divorce and have not remarried[21].

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[10] According to the census, there are 7.5 million English speaking women and 3.2 million French speaking women across Canada. (Catalogue 92-902, Volume 1, National Series, 1981 Census of Canada, Population, Mother Tongue, 1981:5)

Since marital status statistics are specially reported in relation to age, the appropriate Census statistics for the same aged cohort groups are the following: single 16%, now married 81% and divorced and widowed 3%. The marital status of the athletes was considerably different. First, there was an "other" category which was defined by the athletes in their responses as women who live with a partner of the same or other sex and/or women who wish to define their marital status as other. Second, the reported marital status of the athletes (aged 21 to 43 years) is below.

Single........................	47%
Now Married.............	41%
Other.........................	9%
Divorced....................	3%

More athletes are single than would be predicted by the general statistics. Further, the 'other' category provided some opportunity for lesbian and common law relationships to be represented.. The athletes selecting this category cannot be accounted for in the Census statistics. There is, however, a clear identifiable disproportion that exists between the number of single and now married women who are athletes and those from the general population.

Also in (c), athletes are likely to be from larger than average families. Statistics Canada figures from 1961, the approximate year when almost all the athletes would have resided in their family home, indicate that the average family size was about 1.9 children. These respondents are from families that average four children (range one to eleven). In those families, 24% of the athletes were first born and 43% were second born. That is

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[21] These definitions are essentially taken from the Canadian Census (Catalogue 92-901, Volume 1, National Series, 1981:vi). However, in all instances, the athletes were allowed to freely choose which marital status they thought most representative.

70% of the athletes were born first or second in families averaging four children. A further 31% of the athletes were last born[22].

Fourth, in (d), athletes are better educated although with delayed completion of diplomas and degrees. The respondents were well above average for the Canadian population. Among the seventy athletes, there were six Ph.D.'s in progress with an average of 3.7 years of study completed, 24 Master's Degrees (four still in progress) taking an average of 2.3 years to complete and 66 Bachelor's Degrees (eleven still in progress) taking an average of 4.3 years to complete[23]. The range in education among the 70 athletes was high school graduation to fourteen years of university education. The average education of the 1976 female Olympic athletes was five university years. Statistics on educational achievement indicate that schooling advances with age. Therefore, although the national average (Population (92-906) 1981:vi) was grade 12 certification and that statistic is without the age designation, the athletes are undeniably well educated. Where only one in ten of the average female population progressed to some university education and only one in twenty achieved a university diploma or degree, athletes average five university years of education and average slightly more than one completed university degree (75 completed degrees among 70 athletes).

There is considerable variety among the educational diplomas and degrees achieved by the athletes. There were diplomas in languages, special education, mothercraft, legal or medical secretarial and science certifications achieved by the athletes. Among the university degrees, physical education and/or fitness and lifestyle degrees were well represented. There were 22 Bachelor of Physical Education Degrees, 13 Bachelor of Education Degrees (most with a Physical Education Major), 12 Bachelor of Science Degrees and three each of Bachelor of Law and of Administration, and 2 Bachelor of Commerce Degrees. At the Masters Degree level, there were 12 Master of Arts and two each of Masters of Education, of Science, of Medicine and of Business

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[22] Among the athletes' own families, thirty-two of the athletes have children. Twenty-nine were married and three were of 'other' marital status. The thirty-two athletes had forty children. This concurs with the national statistics which identify now-married and lone-parent families average 3.3 persons. This means that in a two parent family, on average there is one child, although some families have no children and some have two or more.

[23] Fourteen Bachelor's Degrees were in Education and are generally considered as at least five year programs. Of those fourteen, two athletes took six years and one took seven years. This is perhaps a testimony to the difficulty some athletes experience in maintaining an uninterrupted university program.

Administration. At the Doctor of Philosophy level, there were six degrees in progress. Only one Ph.D. student indicated she was not working on her Dissertation any longer.

Finally, in (e), athletes have delayed work histories as indicated by their occupation and labour force participation. For occupation, fully 50% considered themselves to be professional workers[24]. That is, they were or wanted to be lawyers, professors, teachers, photographers, sport administrators, doctors, and coaches. Another 33% considered themselves as current or aspiring managers in fitness and lifestyle areas, coaching or owning their own business. Six percent considered themselves to be relatively permanent homemakers. Three percent each considered themselves as clerical, athlete or other workers. Most respondents indicated that they had worked intermittantly throughout their high performance athletic careers. Most often, those employments were unrelated to their occupational goals. Only 18% held full time employment through two consecutive years of high performance participation. Most identified some length of time where their only 'occupation' was that of an athlete.

SPECIFIC SPORT ANALYSIS

These data was gathered in 1985. Tabulation of athletes' responses to a question on sport histories revealed that fully 95% of the athletes active at the high performance level in 1976 had left that competitive level by (or during) 1985. Clearly, the population selected for this research was most appropriate given the number of athletes who left in less than a ten year period.

Leaving patterns can generally be identified by leaving dates. The attrition rate (from 1976 onwards) can be partly described by the year of leaving and the external sport context. The meanings of these leavings are the task of the subsequent interviews conducted with selected questionnaire respondents. The decline in the number of active athletes at the high performance level can be described in the following way. In 1976, at the Olympic Games, all 70 of the questionnaire respondents were active. After those Games, but before the year end, 11 athletes left high performance sport; 59 athletes remained active. In 1977, 5 athletes left; 54 athletes remained active. There were no major international games that year. In 1978, a Commonwealth Games year, 10 more athletes left high performance sport; 44 remained active. In 1979, a pre-Olympic year and Pan American Games year, 6 athletes left; 38 remained active. In 1980, 8 more left; 30 remained active. 1980 was an Olympic Games year but it was also the year that Canada joined in the United States Boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games. No Canadian athletes competed in those Games. In 1981, again with no scheduled international games, 8 more athletes left; 22 remained active at the high performance level. In 1982, another Commonwealth Games year, 5 more left; 17 remained active. In 1983, another pre-Olympic and Pan American Games year, one athlete left; 16 remained active. Nineteen eighty-four was the year of the Los Angeles Olympic Games. Six athletes left that year; 10 remained active. In 1985, the year of data collection, 7 left and 3 remained active at the high performance level. Thus, 95% or 67 of the 70 respondents left high performance sport in the nine years after the 1976 Olympic Games.

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[24] The key word here is *considered*. Athletes were asked to select their occupational category. They were not asked to define that category or to justify their choice. They were, however, additionally asked to identify the specific occupation.

Two points can be made from these data. First, there is no significant link between leaving dates and the sport events. Despite the uncommon problems created by the 1980 Olympic Boycott, more than 36% (25) of the athletes left high performance sport during Olympic years, 26% (18) left in post-Olympic years, 21% (15) in Commonwealth Games years and 10% (7) in the pre-Olympic and Pan American Games years. The meaning of leaving during, for example, an Olympic Games year can not be adequately discussed without basic information about the conditions of leaving, the date of leaving (particularly if the date is before the Olympic Games or afterwards) and how the athletes talk about leaving. In this manner, the links between leaving years and the external sport context can be regarded as weak at this time.

The second point is that the general attrition in the cohort group is reflective of the different distances of leaving experiences from the interview dates. Athletes who left in 1985 would recall fresh experiences while those who left in 1976 would have nine intervening years in which to reflect on and make sense of their leaving experiences. This variability is considered a great advantage to this research.

Survey Conclusions

First, a survey of the population was conducted which revealed that of the 70 female athletes (64%) who responded, the great majority (95%) had left high performance competition by 1985. In less than 10 years, 67 of the athletes had left high performance sport. This points to the ultimate reasonableness or appropriateness of the selection of the 1976 female Olympic athletes as a cohort group to study leaving high performance sport. Demographically, the athletes were identified as being exceptionally well educated (6% High School, 66% College Diploma or University Degree, 27% working on a Master's degree or higher), primarily unmarried and ranging from 21 to 43 years of age. Approximately one-third (33%) had competed in more than one Olympic Games (including the Olympic Boycott of 1980) as their athletic careers spanned 3 to 19 competitive years.

As anticipated, this systematic surveying of athletes' lives served several purposes. First, as suggested earlier, the questionnaire was a comprehensive factual information gathering technique on the characteristics, experiences and the current environment of each of the responding female athletes.

Second, the responses provided the necessary information for selection of athletes to be subsequently interviewed. The leaving dates were identified and the willingness of the athletes to participate in further interviews was positively marked at the conclusion of all but one questionnaire. From the questionnaires, individual athletes who shared or held in common certain characteristics, (e.g., leaving times) could roughly be grouped accordingly. Possible interviewees were then selected according to their distribution through the groups.

Third, for this particular study, it was desirable to have those athletes who are selected be sensitized to the topic of leaving high performance sport. The questionnaire was considered as an initiator of the whole process of thinking, recalling, and integrating some of the events and ideas about leaving high performance sport.

D. DATA COLLECTION: THE INTERVIEWS

Focussed interviews were conducted with the intent of allowing respondents to present information they considered important to their leaving experiences. Information that was subjectively experienced and recalled during the interviews in the form of stories and anecdotes are considered as the very essence of *meaning gathering*. Focussed interviews were conducted with 30 of the 70 athletes who responded to the questionnaire. Three were interviewed a second time.

Interview Guide

The interview guide was semi structured. To compose the interview guide, general language was selected to allow interviewees "room to move" within the questions. Theoretical issues, in some ways, guided the order of questions and also the nature of probes used in the actual interviews. Open-ended questions were designed to allow athletes to tell their own story in their time and order and in their words. The focus of attention was directed towards those aspects of their experience deemed relevant to leaving high performance sport.

The general overall interview guide was as follows:

1. When and how did you become an athlete?
   (a) What sports were you involved in?
   (b) Who are the people you remember being close to?
   (c) How old were you?
   (d) Were there others? How old were they?
   (e) What were the circumstances of these activities?
   (f) What do you recall about the meaning of being an athlete?

2. Tell me something about what being an athlete was like for you in those first years?
   (a) What activities and levels of activities did you participate in?
   (b) What did activity mean to you then?
   (c) How did activity fit in with the rest of your daily life?
   (d) Was it difficult to fit everything together? Do you recall missing sport because of other activities (or vice versa)?
   (e) What do you think motivated you to continue in sport?

3. Tell me something about what being a high performance, Olympic athlete was like.
   (a) What was daily life like in season? Out of season?
   (b) What kinds of goals did you have?
   (c) How did other people introduce you to their friends?

(d) Where do you keep the medals and prizes for winning? What did those prizes mean to you then? And now?

(e) How did you feel about being a female athlete then?

(f) What do you recall about your sport profile (what others knew about you)?

(g) Were you ever 'the first woman' to do something? What does being the first woman mean to you? Were there others around who could be considered as the first woman?

(h) How did people in sport relate to you? People out of sport?

(i) Can you recall a few of the high points and perhaps, a few of the low points about your sport experiences up until this time? What do these experiences mean to you?

(j) How successful were you as a high performance athlete? Could you have been more successful? Under what circumstances?

(k) Are there others who passed through much the same sort of experiences as you have?

4. When did you first start to think about leaving?

(a) When were you conscious of it?

(b)When did you think you might be leaving?

(c) Did you talk about leaving with others?

(d) What did you think about it at the time?

5. Had you had previous leaving experiences?

(a) What kind of leaving experiences?

(b) What do you recall thinking about leaving?

(c) Did you make sense of these experiences?

(d) How did you feel about these experiences?

(e) Have you ever left your sport activities before? Taken time off? Been injured? Other sport leaving experiences?

6. When did you leave high performance competitive sport?

   (a) Can you describe the last few days around your final competition?

   (b) Did you anticipate this leaving experience? In what ways?

   (c) What did you do in the first few days after the final competition? What was different from normal? What was the same? Why do you suppose it was like that?

   (d) How do you recall feeling in those first few days?

   (e) How did you act towards others? How did they act towards you? How did you feel about others around you then?

   (f) Did leaving competitive sport at that time seem appropriate to you? Timely? Meaningful? How?

   (g) Did it make sense to you? How?

   (h) Was there a cermony or function or some other way of marking you leaving?

   (i) Would you, if you had the choice, change anything about those few days around your last competition? Why and in what ways?

7. After leaving, what changes did you make (expect to make)? What did not seem to change?

   (a) In your family relations?

   (b) In your paid and unpaid work?

   (c) In your education?

   (d) In the sport? Other sports?

   (e) In other activities (hobbies, habits)?

   (f) How did you feel about the changes at the time?

   (g) What did the changes or non-changes mean to you then?

8. Have you changed how you think and feel about leaving sport competition from then until now? In what ways?

   (a) What changes have you made in your daily life since then?

(b) What still remains quite unchanged?

(c) What do you think now about leaving high performance sport?

(d) Are there others around you that you talk or have talked about those competitive times with? Do you talk with them about leaving? In what ways? Why?

(e) Are you happy now?

(f) What would you change about your leaving experience if you could? Why?

(g) Are you still involved in sport and/or recreation? In what ways? How do you feel about such activities? How do you feel about yourself participating in them?

(h) Can you or do you want to again be a high performance athlete? Why or why not?

9. Can you tell me something about what you think the next ten years hold for you...just a dream of sorts of what you might be doing, thinking and feeling?

The interview included pivotal questions, lead-in questions and transitions between content areas. As anticipated, the interviews continued to undergo pattern changes as the research progressed. Frequent changes in the order of questions, and the necessary connections between them occurred. However, the general patterns of moving from general to specific, from public to private and from objective to emotive were maintained. Also, a time-ordered approach was constant throughout.

Setting Up the Interviews

The time and place for each interview was mutually agreed upon by the respondent and myself. Generally, the interview sites were restricted to the major urban centers in Canada. The interview site was set where competing time demands were minimal and interview conditions were met. These sites included hotel rooms, coffee shops, private homes, gymnasium, classrooms and offices. In all cases, relative privacy, minimal distractions and suitable spacing between participants were considered essential.

The recording methods for each interview were tape-recording and note-taking throughout the interview. The note-taking served as a check against the planned interview strategy, as a listing of probes to be elaborated upon and as a back-up system if the tape recorder should inadvertantly fail.

The mode of contact and the number of contacts with individual athletes can be discussed together. As stated earlier, initial contact with the athletes from the 1976 Olympic Team was attempted through a questionnaire. If athletes met the seven criteria (identified earlier in this chapter) for selection as interviewees, then the next contact was by telephone. That consisted of an introduction of myself as the researcher, reference to the questionnaire and their subsequent selection for interviewing, and request for permission to arrange an interview. The number of contacts with each athlete was entirely dependent on their participation in single or repeated interview patterns and on their willingness to maintain contact with the research after the interviews.

After each interview, questions needing more attention, in either a re-interview or in future interviews with different athletes, were noted. Notes taken during the session, i.e.: initial bits of analysis, comments about the interview process and/or participants and any notes from the 'off the record' discussions were written up. The tape recording of each interview was transcribed verbatim as soon after the interview as possible. In each case, a full word-by-word transcription was made. The verbatim process seemed imperative in order to record the finer expressions as completely as possible. As these transcriptions were made, initial analysis of the data was conducted. That is, ideas, distinctions and concepts from repeated readings of the data were noted on separate sheets but held in the same file.

Interview Techniques

To begin each interview, athletes were introduced verbally to the research topic of how and under what conditions athletes leave high performance sport. Then, they were asked for permission to record the interview. Once permission was granted, the promise of confidentiality and the interviewees agreement to that promise were recorded. Athletes were instructed that at any time, they could "go off the record" by shutting off the tape recorder and the way to do so was demonstrated. They were then asked to record their name, address and 1976 Olympic sport.

The interview began with questions about how the athlete remembered getting involved in her Olympic sport. Using chronological order as the basic structure, athletes were questioned about their experiences as athletes. A gradual focus towards leaving high performance sport was pursued. Often an athlete would go beyond the confines of the interview situation. She was then encouraged to discuss any narratives or stories as long as the discussion related, in some way, to leaving.

At the conclusion of each interview, each athlete was asked if there were questions they would like to be asked or if they would like to ask any questions. They were then asked if there was anything they wished to add. If not, a thankyou to the athlete was recorded before the tape recorder was shut off.

After the conclusion of the interview, each athlete was invited to make contact with the researcher should questions arise or if they had further information to contribute after having had some reflection time. A university address was provided.

Several athletes indicated that the interview was enjoyable and most requested information about the final reporting of the information. Several athletes did write and/or make verbal contact with the researcher after the interview session was completed. Four wrote short notes with information they wished to add. Four others, including the three re-interviewed athletes, maintained a more regular contact that had not existed before initiation of the research.

Conducting the Interviews

A number of problems arose during the interviews conducted for this study. They were time restrictions, recording problems, acquaintance interviews, topic sensitiveness and retirement status definition problems. These are discussed in turn.

The time restrictions were probably the most serious difficulties affecting interviewing. The restrictions took several forms. First, most interviews were arranged in distant cities. This meant that the researcher was somewhat dependent upon public transportation and the hospitality of those interviewed. The effect of this dependency was perhaps a reduced control over the interview setting and opening and closing circumstances of the interviews. Second, time constraints developed around estimates of time required for the interview (2 hours) and available time of the interviewee. The pressure to fit the interview into the time estimated was sometimes quite difficult. Occasionally, athletes would indicate that they were available for longer than the estimated time and removed the pressure. Other times, athletes indicated that they would be available for less than the agreed upon time. The researcher, placed in the position of choosing between continuing or setting another interview time, always chose to proceed.

The recording problems occurred only twice during some 80 hours of recording. Two one-half hour segments of recorded interview were lost. Fortunately, with the back up key word notes from the interview and prompt transcription (usually in less than one week), a reconstruction of the missing segments was completed.

Third, interviewing acquaintances was problematic. Since the researcher, was a member of the 1976 Canadian Olympic team, a number of the athletes were interested in "catching-up on who was where". Not only did such exchanges risk reducing the amount of time for the actual interview but also, the fine line between confidentiality from survey results and previous interviews and what was perhaps more public information had to be closely guarded. However, interviewing acquaintances was certainly not always problematic [25].

Fourth, the research topic was such that more than 50% of those interviewed were in tears for part of the interview. The tears were sometimes related to the trauma of retirement experiences. Other times, the tears were coincidental with reliving intense past experiences or sadness or the simple sharing of an important experience in a frank and open manner with a sympathetic and similarly experienced interviewer. I sometimes shared not only the discussion of leaving but also the tears. In those tearful instances, I tried to provide empty time (pauses with no questions) for the athletes to gather their composure. Only on three occasions was it necessary for athletes to shut the recorder off while they recovered. I often returned to the questions about more sensitive aspects of leaving if athletes were willing. The ethical question at this point is the psychological safety and security of the athletes being interviewed. In order to reduce the chance of such injury, the actions I took were considered most appropriate within the guidelines of research with human subjects at the University of Alberta. The interview experiences also greatly increased my confidence in myself as a worthy and perceptive investigator. I was frequently able to quickly engage interviewees on the topic of leaving and managed to stay close to the topic by allowing little drift off on tangential accounts.

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[25] Credibility of the researcher to each athlete was never at issue. Frequently, shared experiences were under discussion and considerable "give and take" in some interviews occurred.

Finally, in an effort to focus on leaving, interesting but peripheral avenues of discussion were often limited by the researcher. Some of the closures may actually have reduced fruitful discussion about leaving. However, the ability of the researcher to identify what was significant grew over the number of interviews completed. Hopefully, not much was lost in the initial interviews. All in all, the interviews progressed smoothly despite the above problems.

Interview Analysis

The 30 interviewed athletes each generated thirty-three transcripts of approximately 30 single spaced, typed pages, approximately 1000 pages of rich, detailed data of the leaving experiences of high performance female athletes. The great volume of data had to be carefully managed. The constant comparative method suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is relied on for the basic data management. However, the systematic approach proposed by Glaser and Strauss is elaborated upon to provide more suitable analysis of this qualitative material. These alterations include a careful linking of the questions and propositions raised from the data and the possible contributions from existing theory, the soliciting of feedback from the athletes and from other social scientists familiar with athlete retirement and confirmation of some of the concepts through information gained from the population survey conducted earlier.

The general analytical pattern for this study consists of the constant comparative method utilizing data items and groupings of data items for generating specific analyses and general design. Through the use of the constant comparative method, evidence of a dynamic analysis is presented. The research is exploratory and assumes an analytic posture of moving between data and concepts and between individual abstractions and research explanations in order to fully describe and explain how and under what conditions high performance female athletes leave competitive sport. This analysis is itself an ongoing process. The analysis and data collection ran concurrently.

Originally, the data were housed in three coded systems; the fieldwork files, analytical files and organization files. The fieldwork files contain the original questionnaire data, secondary documentation and interview transcriptions. These files are the raw data; the crucial stimulus to the whole process of qualitative analysis. The second set of records, the analytic files, were established for the purpose of bringing information into relation with other data until patterns began to emerge into substantive categories. In this file, multiple copies of bits of information, ideas and notes are grouped together according to the constant comparative method. A third set of files were used simply to keep the administrative organization about people, places, interview arrangements, documents and so on. A folder for each of the 134 athletes was also established to address patterns not obviously visible in the other fieldwork and analytic files.

Coding and filing of information was conducted more or less continually. There was always a risk of being inundated by the sheer volume of information in a study such as this and as a result, the data management was carefully planned.

Originally, some coded categories were defined too early in the research process. That is, categories defined too much by imported data and theory resulted not only in a considerable waste of time and effort, but also created catergories in which the data did not fit. Once I recognized the problem, I called the categories a false start, laid them aside and began sorting and resorting all over again. The constant filing and coding soon helped some categories achieve stability or saturation. This occured when added information did not reveal new understanding about relations or abstractions made using the constant comparative method.

The information was arranged and rearranged according to the schema contained throughout the presentation of the data in this research until some sociological coherherce became evident. The patterns which emerged from the comparisons were then perused by some of the people who participated in the study. In this way, complications or implications of the research are considered before final conclusions are made. Further, the implications of this research on the other social analysis about sport retirement are seriously considered although no attempt is made to statistically generalize the results to other athletes or of retirement or leaving experiences. Collectively, all information contributes to a general design; an overall structure of existing patterns about how athletes leave high performance sport.

Confidentiality

In the initial contacts with the respondents, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Any information used in the presentation of interview results which identified the sport or the athlete by name was first approved by the interviewees[26]. Where necessary in the reporting, names in quotations, initials, place names, locations and even years were altered. The researcher is sensitive to two points here. First, the truth of the data on the topic of leaving must be maintained. However, the second point is one of personal sensitivity to the athletes' experiences of leaving. In cases where, for example, the year of leaving is unnecessary but identifying of the athlete, it was either varied or left out. In this way, the truth of the data and the confidentiality of the athletes were maintained.

Further, no one was granted access to the interview tapes or the field notes. Only the typist of the pre-transcribed interviews had access to any of the data in its original form. The typist agreed beforehand to keep the information absolutely confidential. The tapes were kept in the author's private residence marked only by a code number. The master sheet of interviewees and corresponding code numbers was kept in private files. Since there were only thirty-three interviews, it was possible to remember the identifying details about individual athletes. These were the precautions taken to adhere to the guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research at the University of Alberta.

E. PRESENTATION OF THE INTERVIEW DATA

Throughout the following chapters, representative quotes are presented to illustrate various kinds of responses found in the larger body of collected information. Although thirty individuals were interviewed, not all are equally represented in the selected quotes. The quotes were selected for many reasons; clarity, representativeness, uniqueness, and general overall expressiveness. Where only a few quotations were available in a particular category, an attempt was made to include all. Where a larger number of quotes were available, both their diversity and commonality in the conceptual area were maintained. The unique was considered equally important with the common. The quotes were, in most cases, directly from the typed transcripts. Only identifying references were removed. Paraphrasing was used where idiomatic language acted to blur rather than enhance the expressions, where redundancy was evident and where flow could be enhanced. Much of these data collected has not been used in this research because it is tangential to the central research question. For example, the language of leaving emergent from this research is presented in appendix D rather than in the body of the text. The language is crucial to the understanding of how athletes talk about leaving but does not contribute substantially to the specific discussion of how and under conditions female athletes leave high performance sport. These and other such data could form the basis of numerous studies at some later date.

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[26] Athletes who might be identifiable in the final research document were contacted by telephone to arrange a meeting. At that time, the information was presented within the context of the reporting, for their perusal. Only once did this result in any changes. In all instances, the athletes gave their approval.

The data is then presented according to several factors: the overall task of the research, the order in which the analyses developed and the level of analytical abstraction.

F. DELIMITATIONS

This study was delimited to include 1976 female Olympic athletes in the summer sports. Only those whose names appeared on a modified official list were considered eligible for the survey. Only those who completed the questionnaire were further included in the research.

No attempt is made, in a statistical sense, to generalize the findings to other groups of athletes or to the general population. In a theoretical sense, the development of substantive theory at the conclusion of this research is definitely intended to be a somewhat general description and analysis of the experience. All theory must make the complex simple, this research does the same. The central purpose of the study was to examine how and under what conditions female athletes leave high performance sport. Consequently, an emphasis is placed on the need to demonstrate logical relationships.

G. LIMITATIONS

Every attempt has been made to ensure that the time between the questionnaires and the interviews was as short as possible. However, despite these efforts, the average time period between them was three to five months. This was specifically due to the difficulties with travelling across Canada and with "grouping" the interviews into available time. No systematic attempt was made to analyze the relationships of the time lapse between the questionnaire completions and the actual interviews.

At the initiation of this research, a similar study was introduced which included female Olympians from 1972, 1976, 1980 and 1984. Since each study was originally designed in concert with the other, the overlap was considerable. After the research for this study was begun, a firmer division between the two studies was initiated by this researcher. Although some data were lost, the inherent integrity of this research was maintained.

H. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter detailed the methodology of the present research. Data collection consists of a survey of the 1976 female Olympic athletes and of in-depth interviews with thirty of the survey respondents. The survey consists of a *fact gathering* of demographic and factual details. The *meaning gathering* portion of the research was done by in-depth interviewing.

The survey, conducted in the spring of 1985, reveals that athletes are generally quite different from other Canadian women of the same age. Thirty interviewees are selected from the respondents to the survey. The interview schedule, organization and techniques for the in-depth interviews and analysis are included in the text of the chapter to illustrate the focus of attention on leaving high performance sport. The chapter concludes with presentation of the data, delimitations, limitations and the chapter summary.

This research is considered as the first essential step to the investigation of high performance female athlete retirement. The procedures for this study are not intended to provide conclusive information about how athletes leave sport but are intended to provide a pool of data and substantive analysis about athletes' leaving experiences from which tentative conclusions can be made.

III. CHAPTER THREE: THE RHYTHM OF SPORT

A. INTRODUCTION: THE ORGANIZATION OF HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT

Olympic athletes enter the complex and unusual competitive sport world, experience their successes and failures and the annual and quadrennial cycles of their particular sport and then, at some point in time, leave the competitive sport world. Since athletes' sport experiences occur within the structural framework of organized sport, that framework must be exposed as fundamental to athletes' experiences. Neither the sport world nor the athlete can be understood separately. Each are the cross threads on the fabric of the other.

This chapter is an examination of the rhythm of the organization of competitive sport for high performance athletes. Included, in summary fashion, are descriptions of the quadrennial cycle of the most prestigious international multi-sport games and the Canadian Olympic organizations. Since 'official' reports often vary from the general understanding of the Olympic experience, included also is the Canadian Olympic Association's description of the selection process for the 1976 athletes, the life in the Olympic Village and the programme and results of each of the Olympic sports teams with female competitors.

Before presenting the organizational structure of sport, it is important to indicate to the reader that the material in this chapter did not generally come from the athletes' recognition that the structure of sport is a major force in their retirement experiences. However, the structure is a strong common thread throughout the interviews and is, therefore, considered as a structural condition which influences sport retirement. It is presented here as the first and overriding condition of retirement; one over which athletes have virtually no control. It is the rhythm of sport, its cyclical structure, which interplays with athletes' individual lives and therefore, their retirement.

B. INTERNATIONAL SPORT GAMES

Amateur sport organizations in Canada follow a relatively consistent pattern of participation in international multi-sport games. The most notable of these are the Pan American Games, the Commonwealth Games and the Olympic Games.

These multi-sport games are held at regular four year intervals and do not overlap. The Pan American Games are held one year prior to the Olympics; the Commonwealth Games are two years prior. The venues for these games change on each occassion of the event.

First, since their inception in 1951, the Pan American Games have formed part of the experience of many Canadian Olympic athletes. Of particular interest to this research are the VII Pan American Games held in Mexico in 1975. The games became a reality through the generous rescue operation of the Mexico (1968) Olympic Committee. First Santiago and then Sao Paolo had to default for political and health reasons respectively. The staging of the games two months later than had originally been scheduled created problems for some Canadian athletes named to the team. Some chose not to attend because of possible negative effects on their Olympic training programmes. The sport competitions hosted at the Pan American games vary. The core sports in which women participate are archery, basketball, diving, equestrian, fencing, softball, swimming, synchronized swimming, track and field and volleyball [27].

The Commonwealth Games were first held in 1930 in Hamilton, Ontario. At that time, they were called the British Empire Games. They have been hosted by Canada twice more since their inception; by Vancouver (1954) and by Edmonton (1978). The sports competitions differ from those of the Pan American Games with Canada consistently entering female competitors in badminton, diving, gymnastics, swimming, synchronized swimming, and track and field. With 48 nations attending, Canadian sport organizations regard the Commonwealth Games as an excellent mid-way marker between Olympic games. The 1974 Games, held in Christchurch, New Zealand were thus perfectly positioned to provide international experience for some Olympic team candidates. However, many of the 1976 Olympic Sport Teams were in the very early developmental stages at the time of the 1974 Games and could not take advantage of the excellent Commonwealth competition.

The Commonwealth Games are regarded as a prestigious and important part of the formative experience of being a high performance athlete in some sports. Since the

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[27] On average, there are approximately twice the number of core sports for male competitors as for the female competitors (Athlete Handbook, Pan American Games, 1979 and 1983).

1978 Commonwealth Games were planned for Edmonton, athletes on some of Canada's national teams could plan to compete internationally in Canada (the home crowd) twice in three years. The timing of the Commonwealth Games as midway marks between Olympic Games might influence the goal setting of high performance female athletes, particularly when the competitions are to be held in Canada.

The Olympic Games, both winter and summer, are held in the same year at different geographic locations. In 1976, the winter games were held in Innsbruck, Austria and the summer games were hosted by the city of Montreal in the province of Quebec, Canada. Although the great majority of the Canadian athletes named to the 1976 summer team had never competed at an Olympiad before, a significant number attended (or were to attend) two or more Olympiads [21]. For example, several of the Equestrian athletes had attended more than one previpus Olympic Games by 1976. One Track and Field athlete, now the Director of Fitness and Amateur Sport Canada, had attended three previous consecutive Olympiads and was the flag bearer for Canada in the opening ceremonies in Montreal. Another notable example is that of a Nordic skiier who competed in the Winter Olympics in Innsbruck (1976) and then competed in the Summer Olympics in Montreal the same year in the canoeing events. She is the only female Canadian athlete ever to compete in both the summer and winter Olympic Games and the only Canadian athlete to do so in the same year. The summer Olympiads which some athletes from this study attended are Rome (1960), Tokyo (1964), Mexico (1968), Munich (1972), Montreal (1976) and Los Angeles (1984).

The summer Olympiad of 1980 (Moscow), was boycotted by Canada. No athletes were allowed to attend. Instead, the athletes were named to the Olympic team and received uniforms. Attendance at the Alternative Games and various international tournaments was substituted as international competition for the Olympic Team.

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[21] Of the 70 respondents in this research, 47 athletes competed only in the Montreal Olympics; 15 athletes attended two Olympiads as competitors; 8 athletes competed in three, four or six Olympiads spanning 12-24 competitive years.

C. OLYMPIC ORGANIZATIONS

The Canadian Olympic Association (C.O.A.) in 1976 was composed of a working executive of 15 men who guided development of amateur Olympic sport in Canada. Another organization, the Olympic Trust, became fully operational prior to the Montreal Olympiad and provided a financial base and security for the C.O.A.. Additionally, increased financial and administrative support from provincial governments and Sport Canada combined with the establishment of the National Sport and Recreation Centre (N.S.R.C.)[29] yielded "solid dividends in improved athlete performances" in 1976 (C.O.A., 1976:3).

The athletes named to the 1976 Olympic Team benefitted from a number of developmental programmes in the quadrennial prior to the Games. In 1972, the C.O.A. set a goal for Canada to finish in 15th place among the participating nations at the 1976 Olympic Games. In conjunction with their goals, they participated in extensive and sustained programme activity during the quadrennial. Among their programmes were the Game Plan, Coaching, Young Olympians, the Information Center, Olympic Club Canada (O.C.C.) and Games Mission. An examination of these programmes provides some very interesting background about the extent and quality of athlete development and support.

First, the Game Plan was conceptually developed in 1972 to substantially increase the number of Canadian world class athletes. In concert with government, the C.O.A. established a development programme for athlete preparation. Including direct athlete assistance, this program cost $8.5million. 37%of this was borne by the C.O.A. and the provinces jointly contributed another $430,000 (C.O.A., 1976:16).

Second, the Athlete Assistance Programme began in 1975 when it became obvious that general training support, lost-time payments and special projects would need funding. With the assistance of Abby Hoffman, now Director of Sport Canada, the program was launched one year prior to the Olympic Games. More than 500 athletes were financially assisted by some 1.4 million dollars (C.O.A., 1976).

Third, in Coaching the C.O.A. had established a coaching association in 1971[30]. This association organized several projects during the quadrennial including an instructional film on coaching [31] and a post-Olympic symposium.

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[29] This ediface is located in Ottawa and houses many of the National Sport Organizations (N.S.O.) and some multisport organizations (eg: Coaching Association of Canada).

[30] This is now an autonomous organization called The Coaching Association of Canada, C.A.C..

Fourth, both the Junior Olympics and the Young Olympians were national programmes which sought to "promote mass participation, athletic enjoyment, character formation and creativity" and "create a strong and continued interest in Olympic sports" respectively (C.O.A., 1976: 17). Both began in 1973 but had little direct impact on athletes from the 1976 Games. Their goals were much more long term.

Fifth, the Information Centre began the gathering and preparation of material for distribution to sport groups, schools, industry, media and the general public.[32]. With the establishment of a central location for information management, more accurate information (particularly on the athletes) was available. Also, the C.O.A. could maintain an informative record on olympians and former olympians over long periods of time.

Sixth, the Olympic Club Canada was established for olympians to promote the aims of the C.O.A.. The O.C.C. was still in its formative years and concentrating on regional organization and forming initial chapters in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver. As a result, the impact of this group was minimal on the 1976 athletes prior to the Olympic Games.

Seventh, Games Missions are those programmes designed to develop and manage support staff and services for athletes involved in the C.O.A. Game Plan. In the time period relevant to this study, this included programmes for the Pan American Games (1975) and the Olympic Games (1976). Clothing supplies, medical care and intra-village communications were among the major Games Mission responsibilities.

Finally, the C.O.A. established a Communication Committee which sought to broaden the appeal of the Olympic movement through publications. These documents were published throughout the 1972-1976 quadrennial and included The Record, the C.O.A. Bulletin, Journal Canada, and the much sought after Team Handbook.

Combined, these programmes contributed to athlete identification, development, team selection and preparation and to the general quality of the Olympic experience for the participants of the XXI Olympiad in Montreal in 1976.

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[31] This film was discussed by several of the volleyball players and one equestrain athlete in their interviews for this research. These athletes participated in the filming and recall it clearly.

[32] Currently, the Athlete Information Bureau (A.I.B.) performs similar although extended functions.

D. CANADIAN OLYMPIC TEAM SELECTION PROCESS

In the publication Canada at the Olympics: 72-76 (C.O.A., 1976), it is reported that the 1976 Olympics were special for Canada as the host country. More particularly, the host nation has the privilege of registering and entering in each of the team and individual sports without having to qualify. All selected Canadian teams met only two criteria; those of having embarked upon an intensive training program and having shown marked improvement prior to the summer games. Of the team sports (eg. basketball and volleyball), all those athletes recommended by the sport governing organizations were accepted. In the individual sports (eg. swimming and archery), the Chef de Mission reported that the selection criteria were drawn by the Technical Committee of the C.O.A., the directors of the Coaching Association of Canada, and sport consultants of Sport Canada. With few exceptions, the individual sport athletes were required to win (or place in the top three) at the Canadian Olympic trials and to make performance standards (scores or times) prior to the Olympic Games. A total of 134 female athletes in 12 sports were named to the Canadian Olympic Team[33].

E. LIFE IN THE OLYMPIC VILLAGE

All athletes in this study shared at least one common experience, that of attending the Olympic Games. Although the Canadian athletes arrived in Montreal at various times, some as early as one month prior to the opening ceremonies, most were housed in the Olympic Village. The exceptions are those athletes who made specific arrangements to be housed outside the Village and the Equestrian athletes whose venue was in Bromont, Quebec. Also, when the number of actual coaches exceeded the number allowed in the Village, coaches were housed in hotels just outside the Village gates.

Security was heavy for athletes arriving in Montreal. Athletes arriving at the airports were met with special busses guarded front and rear by armed forces personnel. Combined, all Olympic sites were guarded by some 10,000 military personnel. Once through the security entry station, the athletes were assigned housing in the two residential towers. Each apartment had thirteen beds - some in the two bedrooms and the majority in the general living area. There was only one bathroom facility in each apartment. Some athletes shared the accomodation with other sport teams and even other countries' athletes. Most however shared the apartment with their teammates. For example, the Canadian Women's Volleyball Team occupied one apartment; the Canadian Women's Rowing Team occupied two. The C.O.A. reported that most of the Canadian athletes were satisfied with the living conditions in the Olympic Village: "the food (a 24 hour service) was excellent; social activities were numerous and varied, and life at the Olympic Village was generally happy and most pleasant" (1976:65).

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[33] The 134 athletes names are listed in the 1976 Team Handbook, considered the primary source for this research. Spares are included, many attended the Olympic Games but did not have the opportunity to compete.

All athletes were required to wear an identification/pass which allowed them into the Village and specific training and competition sites. The pass also had to be used for any team transportation to and from training or competitions. Only in particular exceptions could the pass be used to view competitions other than at one's own venue.

In the Village, all athletes were invited to participate in physical-anthropological studies which measured such items as height, weight and somatotype. Participating athletes were then provided with a result sheet placing individual's scores on a multisport somatotype grid. Also, female athletes were required to take the "sex test"; equestrian athletes were the only female olympians exempted from such testing (029).

The only other testing which occurred with great frequency was the drug testing at each competitive site. After competitions, all medallists and selected others were required to submit to such tests. Also, lists of banned drugs were circulated to the Canadian athletes and the medical staff assisted where problems arose.

The first official event for Canada's Olympic athletes was the opening ceremonies. A total of 9500 athletes and officials representing 113 countries registered for the Games and the majority marched in these ceremonies [34]. As the host country, Canada was the last team parade to enter the stadium.

Olympic competitions were held, as scheduled, over a two week period. Some Canadian athletes finished competing in the first week due to event scheduleing (eg. swimming and archery) or to early eliminations (eg. gymnastics and diving). Others did not finish until the final day of Olympic competition (eg. 400 metre relay in Track and Field). As a result, life in the Olympic Village combined celebrations for events finished and medals won with athletes preparing for upcoming events.

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[34] Shortly after these opening ceremonies, 684 athletes from 23 African countries were withdrawn for political reasons.

Once competition for the athletes in a particular sport was concluded, managers permitted some to leave for home. Most managers requested that their athletes remain for the closing ceremonies[35]. Security remained strict until the athletes were placed aboard airplanes or were signed out of the Village on their own recognisance (with team permission).

F. OLYMPIC SPORTS

An overview of each of the Olympic Sports in which female athletes participated is included in order to provide as complete a picture as possible of the opportunities and the results of the participants. Each sport team undergoes unique development experiences and concludes these experiences with different results. The historical development of the sport over at least the quadrennial prior to the 1976 Olympic Games is crucial to understanding the competitive results and the meaning of those results to the athletes. There are twelve sports in which women participated in the 1976 Olympic Games: archery, basketball, canoeing (canoe-kayak), equestrian, fencing, gymnastics, team handball, rowing, shooting, swimming and diving, track and field, and volleyball. It is significant that these results appear here because they are part of the description of the common base of experience, particularly the 1976 Olympic Games, that the research population shared.

Archery. The women's event combines scores in two rounds of 70 metre, 60 metre, and 30 metre targets. Two athletes competed in this event, finishing 5th and 16th overall. Each athlete set Canadian records during the competitions.

Basketball. The Canadian Women's Basketball Team was formed following a tryout camp in 1975. There were 14 athletes originally chosen, although two were cut just prior to the Olympic Games. The team practised diligently and attended tournaments in East Germany, China, Columbia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, and France and attended the Pan American

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[35] One major exception to this process existed; several Canadian swimmers were sent home at the conclusion of the swimming competition because of poor celebratory conduct.

Games in Mexico City. The team played five games at the Olympic tournament, losing all five although one was by a margin of only eight points.

Canoeing. Women competed in only the kayak events within the canoe-kayak competitions and Canada named only the kayak-1 and the kayak-2 as represented events. In the kayak-1 event, the solitary Canadian entry finished 12th. She then combined with another athlete to qualify for the finals in the Kayak-2 event and finished a credible 8th place. Two of the four selected athletes were spares, ie: they did not compete during the Olympics.

Equestrian. Like yachting and shooting, equestrian events in 1976 were not exclusive to either males or females. The Equestrain athletes trained in Florida early in 1976 and then moved north to the Boston area for the team trials in June of the Olympic year. Once the team was selected, the athletes moved to Lake Placid for an intense training camp and then moved to the Olympic site at Bromont, Quebec. Six athletes competed in two events, the dressage and the 3-day event. In dressage, the athletes finished 7th, 11th and 18th and captured the 5th overall team title. In the 3-day event, two athletes finished 11th and 23rd and placed 6th overall for the team title. As the C.O.A. reported, "these results were as good as could be expected (given) the unfortunate circumstance[34] which necessitated a coaching change following the Pan American Games" (C.O.A., 1976:86). The athletes in these events were responsible not only for their own physical and mental preparation but also that of their horses. The health of these horses played a major role in the final Olympic Games results.

Fencing. Four athletes were named to this team in May of 1976. This was a great improvement from the single athlete named to the 1972 team in Munich. After the 1976 National Championships, the selected athletes trained at the Institut Nationale des Sports in Paris until the end of the month of June. Women are only allowed to compete in the foil event at the Olympic Games. Three athletes placed 26th, 35th and 43rd overall. The team was eliminated in the first round of the competitions for the team championship.

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[34] This circumstance is discussed in detail later in this dissertation.

Gymnastics. The gymnastics team was composed of six athletes placing 27th, 29th, 33rd, 51st, 66th, and 71st overall. The Canadian Gymnastics Association reported that they were very pleased with the results, particularly since three of the team members received the Federation Internationale des Gymnastiques pin for averaging 9 or better (out of 10) in Olympic competition. Three team members made finals in their individual events and helped the team to a 9th place standing.

Team Handball. The Team Handball Association reported that "without any real international experience, the Canadian Women's Handball Team surprised many observers who expected (them) to be easy prey" (C.O.A., 1976:102). The team of 14 Quebec women had participated in only two tournaments prior to the Olympic Games. In Olympic competition, the team lost games to the medal winners by scores of 21-3 (U.S.S.R.), 24-3 (Hungary), and 29-4 (G.D.R.) but were very competitive with Romania (17-11) and Japan (15-14). These results placed the Canadian Handball Team in a very comfortable and well earned 6th place in world competition.

Rowing. The first national rowing team was formed in 1976. Prior to this, representative "club" crews wore Canadian colours abroad. Additionally, these were also the first Olympic Games where women's events were scheduled. In late 1975, a program of training and preparation using the "camp" [37] concept brought the best oarswomen together to compete for crew positions. The scullers trained in Florida and the sweep rowers at Burnaby Lake, B.C. until the initial selections at the end of April. Boats were assigned shortly after seat races in London, Ontario. These were followed by time trails at the Olympic Basin in Montreal and a two-regatta European tour. Canadian women's crews medalled for the first time in international competition at the Duisberg Regatta in West Germany. At the other regatta, the famous Lucern-Rotsee Regatta in Switzerland, the women's eight established a world record by breaking the three minute mark over the 1000 metre course [38]. The National Team returned to Canada in June of 1976 and trained in Welland, Ontario until the day before the opening ceremonies when they moved into the Olympic Village. As a result of the successful European tour, all the women's crews were named to the Olympic Team. The crews were the eight with coxswain (8+), the coxed four (4+), the coxed quadruple sculls (4x+), the coxless (or straight) pair (2-), the double sculls (2x) and the single sculls (1x). With 24 crew women and 4 spares, the Women's Rowing Team was the largest contingent among the Canadian women's teams. The crews and final places are as follows:

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[37] The "camp" concept is a program whereby all athletes with a reasonable chance of being selected to the representative team are brought to the same location for an extended period of time (weeks/ months). The purpose of being "in a camp" is to select the best possible seats for crew members and give the newly formed crews a chance to "gell".

[38] At the 1976 and 1980 Olympics, women's events were 1000 metres in

8+...........4th place (final)
4+...........7th place (petite final)
4x+.........9th place (petite final)
2-............5th place (final)
2x...........6th place (final)
1x...........11th place (petite final)

Shooting. There are seven shooting events in Olympic competition but only in Trap Shooting, did a woman qualify for the Canadian Team. The team was selected over two seasons, Olympic trials in L'Acadie in 1975 and further trials in late May of 1976. So flexible were the selections that the athlete was not positive she was on the team until she checked into the Olympic Village just before opening day. The shooting ranges were in L'Acadie just outside the city and major inconveniences were caused because ammunition and shotguns/rifles had to travel on different transport vehicles and be held in "security" at the village and at the shooting site. Also, travelling to the shooting range took approximately one hour and some delays were caused by equipment not being ready when the competitors were. This prompted the Canadian athlete to check out of the village and stay in a hotel until her competitions were concluded. She then returned to the village and shared in post-competitive village life. This Canadian female competitor finished 25th overall out of approximately 55 competitors.

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[31](cont'd) length and the men's events, 2000 metres. In 1984, women raced in Olympic competition over 2000 metres, the newly accepted international race distance.

Swimming and Diving. For swimming, the team trials were held in June of 1976 in Etobicoke, Ontario. Qualifiers were required to meet standard times and/or place in the top three in their event. The selected team then moved to Carleton University (Ottawa) and then the University of Laval (Quebec City) to train an average of 11 two hour sessions per week. Once in the Olympic Village, this was reduced to one hour sessions as athletes were "tapered" for their events. The swimmers were able to train once per day in the Olympic pool and at various other training sites for their other daily practices. There were eighteen women named to the Canadian Olympic Swimming Team. Their results were as follows:

100 metre freestyle	9th, 10th, 11th
200 metre freestyle	5th, 13th, 14th
400 metre freestyle	9th, 11th
800 metre freestyle	6th, 9th, 10th
100 metre backstroke	3rd, 4th, 5th
200 metre backstroke	3rd, 8th, 12th
100 metre breaststroke	9th, 13th, 15th
200 metre breaststroke	9th, 11th, 23rd
100 metre butterfly	6th, 9th, 10th
200 metre butterfly	5th, 6th, 11th
400 metre individual medley	2nd, 3rd, 7th
4 X 100 metre medley relay	3rd
4 X 100 metre freestyle relay	3rd

All of the medals won by Canadian women at the Olympics in 1976 were won by members of the above team, one silver medal (400 m. individual medley) and six bronze medals (100 and 200 m. backstroke, 400 m. individual medley, and the two relays).

In Diving, five women competed in two events; 3 metre and 10 metre (tower) boards. In the 3 metre event, they finished 9th, 14th and 17th. In the 10 metre event, they finished 5th, 6th and 14th. In the C.O.A. report, one comment of particular interest was "citing the lack of objectivity on the part of the judges, (the team manager) claims support from divers and coaches of other nations in the contention that (one Canadian diver) could well have placed second or third if political pressures did not exist among the judges" (C.O.A., 1976:128). This is one of the rare mentions of the word political in any of the official Olympic Games reports.

Track and Field. Twenty women were named to this team at the end of June, 1976 at the Canadian team trials. After a brief competitive sojurn in London, England the team returned to the Olympic Village to prepare for the Olympic competitions. The team members competed in all but one of the women's track and field events (no entry was made in Javelin). The results are as follows:

100 metres	13th, 16th, 31st
200 metres	9th, 10th, 29th
400 metres	23rd, 30th, 31st
800 metres	21st, 22nd, 28th
1500 metres	28th, 33rd
100 metre hurdles	20th
4 X 100 metre relay	4th
4 X 400 metre relay	8th
High Jump	10th, 20th, DNQ
Long Jump	11th
Shot Put	13th
Discus	11th, 13th
Pentathalon	6th

Volleyball. The 1976 Olympics were the first olympics in which Canadian women entered volleyball. This 14-member team underwent intensive training from May of 1974 until July of 1976. They participated in numerous tournaments including the 1974 World Championships (11th place) and the 1975 Pan American Games (5th place). The coach made the final two cuts in June of 1976 and the 12 remaining women moved into the Olympic Village one month prior to the opening ceremonies. The team finished 8th overall, and although they did not win a match, they won games from each of the teams that went on to win medals.

Results Summary. The purpose of exploring team programmes and results is three-fold. First, for example, if an athlete indicates that she finished 9th at the Olympic Games, this standing must be placed into the context of the competition in order to make sense of the 9th place. The following questions are prompted: How many teams were there? How close were you to 8th place? What was the winning time (distance, score)? How did you do when you competed against the eventual winner? How did your team do in the previous Olympics? It is obvious that answers to these questions can provide a situation specific context about what the athletes are saying. At a minimum, previous team results and current specifics of the competitive experience can flesh out the meaning of one's results. Secondly, in order to understand more precisely, the meaning of 9th place (the example), questions about other teams are prompted. How did the swimmers do? And the rowers? How about the gymnasts? These questions are of a comparative nature but not specific to the particular sport discipline where the 9th place result was achieved. Thus, results of other sport disciplines are useful as comparatives against which particular results can be measured. Third, personal perceptions of the participants are needed in order to understand the true complexity of the Olympic experience. Although descriptions of the sport development and training programs assist in drawing out what happened, how the athletes were affected is unknown. Questions such as "What did you think about arriving at the Olympic Village one entire month before the opening?", "What did you think about the fact that the team selections were in Etobicoke rather than your own home town?" and even, "Did you enjoy the competitive experience at the Games?" lead to clearer interpretations of the meaning of the Olympic experience which is, after all, as vitally important as are the competitive results. Using the skeletal structural framework now laid out, the personal reports of the competitors will form the substance of much of the remainder of this dissertation.

G. SUMMARY

It can be seen that the sport world of the high performance athlete is a complex and organized one. Although organized it cannot be considered structurally rigid or static. Rather, it is an annual and quadrennial cycle that continues impersonally. It is the rhythms established by the major competitions which create the opportunities for the individual athletes. These rhythms, therefore, create a certain dependency for athletes who must rely on the regulated pattern in order to benefit from and be exposed to high levels of competition.

Canadians performed very well in international and specifically Olympic competition although they were generally hampered by a lack of international competitive experience. While many Canadian contestants were eliminated in the first round, this was somewhat expected because of the selection criteria. The C.O.A. apparently had anticipated this. "We knew full well that some of our teams had not yet attained the level of excellence necessary to do well in tournaments as prestigious as those of the Olympic Games." (C.O.A., 1976:62). Overall, the Canadian team moved from an unofficial 21st place among the competing nations in 1972 to 11th place in 1976. This was due to what the C.O.A. identified as the brilliant results of the swimming team (2 silver, 6 bronze, 3-4th places, 4-5th places, and 4-6th place finishers). Combined in all sports, Canadians won 5 silver and 6 bronze medals. Of these, one silver and all bronze medals were won by female swimmers. No other female athletes medalled.

Clearly, the framework of organized sport is neither rigid nor static, but rather, an impersonal cycle which repeats itself annually and quadrennially. The organizational framework of sport controls, to a great degree, the athletes' point of entry, length of involvement, opportunities for involvement and subsequent leaving. Thus, despite its relative absence from the athletes' own accounts of retirement, the sport structure is a powerful condition of retirement.

IV. CHAPTER FOUR: LEAVING BY CHOICE

A. INTRODUCTION

After a preliminary sorting of the data, particular attention is directed toward how and under what conditions female athletes leave high performance sport. This chapter is the first of four chapters which explore both the common and distinctive features of athletes' reported retirement experiences.

In this chapter, the experiences of athletes who expressed a perception of high levels of control over their retirement decisions are examined. That is, this chapter explores how athletes with perceived control over their retirement left high performance sport. Although it is understood that such experiences do not occur independently of the structure of organizaed sport nor isolated from a number of other retirement situations described in chapters five, six and seven, its value as a separate chapter rests with the distinctive recollections of personal control.

Control is defined in this study as the ability or authority to command or influence an event in an athletes' life. Specifically, the decision-making process of female athletes are considered, by the athletes, to be of primary importance in leaving or retiring from high performance competition. The nature of the decisions and the context in which the decisions are made are examined in light of the athletes' perceived control. To describe this process of the decision to leave, a scenario is provided. In this scenario, a high performance athlete recounts her struggle with the decision to leave high performance sport.

This chapter examines the diversity of athletes' perceived control in the decision-making process and also, the contexts of those decisions. Leaving high performance sport does not happen in a void. Rather, any number of reasons may be given for the timing of retirement. Further, the decision to leave high performance sport does not necessarily mean that retirement will, in fact, occur. Therefore, the permanence of the athletes' decisions is examined with regard to their continuing sport involvement. Also, precisely from what do the athletes retire?

Since a detailed description of how athletes decide to retire is impossible, the essence of the crucial decision-making by the athletes is accomplished by including some context and some biography together with the recollections of the athletes. The categories of data are formed both from the athletes' own words and their systhesis of their experiences. It is their logic which guides this discussion of control, i.e.: the athletes' decision-making abilities and their overall authority to direct or influence their retirement experiences. Although the categories don't seem to be logical or purely abstract, they are the athletes' own depictions of leaving.

Generally, the athletes recalled making decisions to leave high performance sport over extended periods of time. Few recalled a point at which they were 'aware' of impending leaving. Most described it as a gradual 'coming to recognize' that they would be leaving in the relatively near future[39]. Thus, it is important to keep in perspective two important points: the perceived control over the leaving decisions and the process through which such decisions were made.

B. THE ATHLETES DECIDE TO LEAVE

Some athletes do decide, in advance, to leave high performance sport. Although they are not always able to follow through with the plans to leave, they do attempt to retire in appropriate and untroublesome ways. Their sense of control is important and contributes to perceptions of satisfactory retirement.

Others, despite their decisions to leave, find it impossible to follow through with their plans. As a result, they report some disillusionment with their experiences. There appear to be two ways that disillusionment is lived out. First, there are those who shift performance goals to life goals. Although cynacism may be expressed by the athletes, it is often not directed at sport. Second, there are those whose disillusionment is directed toward the sport system. They are the agitators.

Finally, there are the athletes who "drift" out of high performance sport because they have lost their "drive". Some are able to articulate this loss of motivation or withdrawal. Others are not.

The references to decision-making with control could be, therefore, be said to fall into three closely linked areas: *retiring with commitment to performance goals, retiring with disillusionment* and *retiring with loss of motivation.* These three areas will be addressed separately so that the nature of particular kinds of decisions can be understood more clearly. Also, the overlaps and linkages can be more informatively discussed. Second, a vignette from a single interview is presented to illustrate the complexity of the process through which the athletes' *come to understand* their status as a retiring (or active or on a comeback) high performance athlete. By examining each area in turn, the nature of particular kinds of decisions can be seen more clearly, and again, the presence of overlaps and linkages can be more knowledgeably discussed.

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[39] In the next chapter, athletes who reported having little control over their leaving experience, describe similar leaving situations.

Retiring With Commitment to Performance Goals

Some athletes decided to leave high performance sport and sought to achieve performance related goals before leaving. These athletes reported a commitment to sport, a sense of personal control over their retirement experiences and overall, a satisfactory retirement.

Retiring with commitment to performance goals consists of two sections; goal achievement contingencies and partial, rather than full, control over decisions about leaving.

With regard to goal achievement contingencies, eight different examples illustrate just how athletes linked decisions about leaving competitive sport to major events or goals. Retirement for six of the athletes was contingent upon qualifying for major representative teams as a sort of final goal, the seventh and eighth made their retirement contingent upon performance goals.

From very similar circumstances, two of the six athletes who considered qualifying for the teams as a final goal, made very different decisions about their retirement. Both planned to leave immediately after their first Olympic Games experience in 1976. One, a second string player who seldom got floor (playing) time, recalled that

> I knew it would be my last year because I had accepted a teaching job for September. (014:97)

The other, a younger but first string player on the same team, recalled

> That's why they were playing, to make the Olympics. So that became my goal, too. But I said that I was going to leave after 1976. I was going to retire. I didn't want to play club ball after playing internationally. (012:47)

Indeed, the first athlete did leave her Olympic sport as an international competitor. From her statement, some form of closure is evident. That is, the remainder of her life was being organized without room for high performance sport. Also, given that the athlete described herself as being very near her maximal playing potential at that time, she felt it unlikely that she would have achieved higher goals in the future. The second athlete, however, went on to play internationally and was a member of the 1984 Olympic Team that competed in Los Angeles. She had not achieved her potential as a player in 1976 but understood that club ball was the only alternative to international play. However, after the Olympic Games, each successive year presented this athlete with another opportunity to play international ball. At the time of interviewing, this athlete was undecided and ambivalent about her retirement status.

These experiences raise questions about the permanency of decisions and also the linking of leaving decisions to a major event such as the Olympic Games. At the time of the interviews, both of the athletes were still playing and competing in their sport for representative teams. From this, it appears that athletes may retire from international sport competitions rather than sport competition as a whole. That is, they chose to decrease the level of competition rather than terminate competition altogether.

Four more athletes chose to retire after either the 1978 Commonwealth Games or the 1980 Olympic Games. The Commonwealth Games were held in one athlete's hometown and, for what this athlete described as very personal and sentimental reasons, she chose to

> compete through 1978 and retire after the Commonwealth Games and the World Championships in West Berlin. (024:31)

Since this athlete was named to the National Team in 1978, she found herself obliged to continue past the Commonwealth Games competition and on to the World Championships of that season. She performed well at the Commonwealth's but only managed to 'hang on' until the World's and turned in poor race results. She recalled being so ready to quit by the time the competitions arrived that any little problem would have been sufficient for her to pack her bags and come home. Since 1978, this athlete has become an active coach in her sport in her hometown.

A commitment to continue until a certain point or event is similar to what Prus and Irini (1980) name continuance commitment. This athlete's goal was to meet her commitments...her personal commitment to compete in her home town at the Commonwealth Games and her athletic commitment to compete as a full member of the

1978 Canadian National Team. Even though she had decided to leave high performance competition after achieving the first commitment, she held off the actual retirement until after the second commitment.

The other three athletes chose the 1980 Olympic year as their final year. Coincidentally, all three were competitors in the same sport. One athlete, a spare who did not have the opportunity to race in 1976, reported that

> I worked towards the 1980 Olympics...that might not be a bad goal to do. So, from 1978 on, that's what I worked towards. I hoped to make it. I didn't think of the down side because I didn't want to go out on a low note. (002:111, 116)

Another athlete recalled

> I knew right from the beginning that (retirement) was happening in 1980. It wasn't anything I agonized over. (005:93)

She was, at that point, reaching the end of her undergraduate degree in commerce and was anxious to move into a profession. And a third, who indicated that not only was it her final year, but that

> I was retiring, win, lose, fail or whatever. (016:49)

This athlete had been an international competitor over a thirteen year span in two different sports. She was working as a sport consultant and had been offered a promotion that would provide less flexibility in working conditions. Her actual performances were not the primary issue in her retirement. Instead, the issue was making the team and then leaving irrespective of the competitive results.

These three athletes all planned to leave high performance sport after attempting to compete at a second Olympic Games. That is, they chose to reach at least two major Olympic goals before they decided to leave high performance competition. Such decisions were not without risk. For example, athletes may be unsuccessful in reaching the second peak, may go out on a 'low note', or may leave "win, lose, fail or whatever". As one athlete explained, going out on a 'low note' meant that not making the 1980 Olympic team after having made the 1976 Olympic team would have been anti-climactic. She wanted to finish on top. The perceived risk of not making the second Olympic Team or of going out at a lower achievement level was acknowledged.

All four athletes chose to stay in high performance sport until they achieved their team performance goals. Two of the three remaining examples illustrate that other athletes linked the retirement decision to actual performances. One athlete changed racing categories between 1976 and 1980 which put her at a distinct disadvantage at the 1980 Olympic Trials. Although she was very competitive, the athlete recalled that her pre-retirement goal was to repeat her earlier Championship wins for the third consecutive year.

> I decided to leave and it was a difficult decision. It was my last year. The Boycott had taken the wind out of my sails and I decided...I would try to repeat the U.S.A. titles and the Canadian Henley and Canadian Championship titles for the next season. At the end of 1981, I hung up my blades. (001)

At the end of the 1981 season, she did retire from competition in that sport and began coaching. From 1982 until the time of the interview, she also participated in national level competition in yet another sport and the World Master's Games (1985) in both sports.

The second of the three athletes decided to leave the sport after she "raced a perfect race". That race happened in 1977 at the end of the season. She knew at the time of finishing the race that she would be unable to perform better.

> I raced my very best race. I was so ready for it that when I started the race, it was like I had already done it. There was no pain, no exhaustion. It was easy - so easy. It was like my mind was removed and separate from my body and I just felt the enormous ease of it all. The flow. When I finished the race, I remember being surprized at how exhausted I suddenly felt. And, to this day, I can clearly remember the goosebumps all over me. It was like I was superhuman for a short moment. I just knew that I could never do better...never! (004:62)

This athlete continued to race in local and regional races after that but never again raced for reasons other than enjoyment. Thus, some athletes made their decisions to leave high performance sport based upon repeating wins or experiencing a perfect race.

Thus, it appears that athletes made decisions to leave high performance sport based on one of two factors: making a representative team and meeting performance goals. The most frequently identified factor was the making of Olympic or Commonwealth Games teams in the final year. This is closely related to a second factor, that of achieving certain performance goals before leaving. Many athletes sought to describe the conditions or contingencies of their sport retirement before actually leaving high performance sport.

Also in *retiring with commitment to performance goals* there is some evidence of variations in athletes' sense of control. That is, even though decisions made in advance gave athletes' a sense of control, at the time of leaving, the circumstances of leaving were largely out of their control. Athletes' were not always able to follow through with their plans for retiring, they expressed a sense of control over their experiences which appears to have led to more satisfying retirements than if no decision-making had take place.

The following example illustrate that when one leaves may be under one's control and if the realities of life allow the "plan" to be realized, the experience of leaving is more satisfying than if the "plan" can't be carried out. First, an athlete whose performance abilities were seriously reduced at a critical time in team selections, recalled that

> I knew they were catching up and even though I hadn't reached my potential, I couldn't work any harder because of my injuries. So I knew that would be my last competition...(and) I knew I was one of those last three to be selected and being injured sounded like a death bell. (014:87, 141)

She left immediately after the Olympic Games. Another athlete was caught in a series of changing circumstances which included her advancing age (30 years) and four years before the next Olympic Games.

> When they announced the Boycott, I knew I wasn't going to compete anymore. I was 30 and that was all I was going to give it. (016:64)

Both athletes were "caught between a rock and a hard place". They recognized their now limited competitive potential. The fact that they were able to choose when and under what conditions to retire meant that certain factors were in their favor; choice, level of experience, relative success and awareness of changing context of their athletic experience. Of course, not all factors are controllable.

Retiring with commitment to Performance goals describes how a number of athletes decided to leave high performance sport. Within this category, a greater degree of control was evidenced by those who chose both when and under what conditions they would leave competitive sport. They described choosing the year, the competition and the performance goals as contingencies of their leaving. A somewhat lesser degree of control was evident when athletes reported that the timing of their retirement was not entirely dependent on them, that is, other impinging factors contributed principally to the timing of retirement. These examples share several features. First, the decision to retire is made in advance. Second, the way to retire is by attempting to achieve sport related goals prior to leaving. This functions to keep the athlete committed to the high performance sport until the last possible moment and to signal a non-troublesome retirement. Third, if the actual retirement happens more or less as planned, the athlete experiences a perception of personal control and the retirement, after the fact, is viewed as satisfactory.

Retiring With Disillusionment

The second category of retirement is identified as *retiring with disillusionment*. This is somewhat different but not entirely different from the first category. The category is developed from athlete accounts which combined perceived control (or choice) with an element of disillusionment with sport and/or the sport system. Two types of *retiring with disillusionment* are apparent but are similar in that they experience an element of disillusionment.

THE COMPLETERS

In the first type of disillusionment, athletes chose to complete their perceived obligations to high performance sport. Generally, these athletes recalled making decisions about leaving high performance sport where sport goals were replaced with non-sport goals. Often this served to redirect the athletes' commitments. The athletes simply did not want to continue, i.e., "enough was enough". The first "enough" is generally linked with the hardships related to competitions, travelling or training. The second "enough" seems to be the self-evident reason for leaving as in "I've had enough and so I'm leaving". Combined, the hardships and the awareness of hardships are sufficient reasons to leave.

One athlete in rowing simply decided that she'd had enough.

> By that time, I couldn't care less. My heart wasn't in it. I didn't even care. (016:68)

She had taken a year's leave of absence from her work in preparation for the 1980 Olympic Games, and the announcement of the Boycott simply removed all vestiges of wanting to compete internationally. She raced at the "Alternative Games" but never recovered her pride in competition. After finishing her commitment to the Canadian Team in 1980, she stopped training and competing.

Another athlete, this time from track and field, suffered an injury. Although she began to make a strong comeback, she suddenly realized that she no longer wanted to be just a competitor.

> I've never thought I'd retired. I just thought I'd had enough and chose to leave. I decided, "No, I don't want to play this game anymore". I told my coach I wasn't going to be training or competing anymore. (011:78)

However, it took another three weeks for the athlete to inform her coach of her decision because

> Being so tangled up in trying to be the perfect athlete, I thought he would hate me if I told him I wanted to quit. I was petrified to tell him. That was the worst part about leaving...telling the coach. (011:80)

For this athlete, deciding to leave high performance sport was more easily accomplished than the disclosure of the decision to others.

After seven years of international competition, another athlete recalled that

> I just got to the point where I said "I've had it. I've had enough". (012:66)

She simply decided that her experiences with the sport were no longer new and challenging and it had become 'a drag'. It may be difficult to understand how travelling internationally could be considered 'a drag' but this athlete travelled frequently and with little notice for a number of years. The frantic arrangements before each trip, she explained, took away from the excitement of the trip. Also, when she was travelling, she found the team regulations (curfews, rest times, meal formats, limits to tourist activities) to be increasingly restrictive. So, she decided that 'enough was enough' and no longer made herself available for international trips. This decision preceeded the sport governing organization's announcement of the representative travelling team for Canada that year and the athlete in question was simply not listed as a team member. As she recalls, that was her retirement from all those years of high performance sport..."not so much as a goodbye!"

Another example revealed one athlete's growing unease with her participation in competitive sport.

> It started for me in late 1975. I started to feel quite uneasy and it took a year and a half afterwards to understand what the cause was. So, I got rid of the cause. I'd just had enough, so by March, I quit. (018-19:66, 92)

Despite the sense of unease that gripped this athlete, she competed in the arduous Olympic Trials in her sport, was successful and embarked on a five to six hour per day training program accompanied by an intense racing schedule. She then raced three separate races at the Olympic Games and returned to her home town to train all winter for the 1977 season. From this example, it is possible to understand how some athletes are embedded in the sport experience and delay dealing with problems as they arise. Further, this athlete was one of the sibling pairs[40] to compete in Montreal[41]. At the time of the interview, this same athlete indicated

> I haven't retired. I never thought of it that way so I guess I can't respond to it...retirement. Sport threads all through the way I live my life. I continue to start and to quit. (018-19:105)

For the first three athletes, there appears to be a readiness to retire. They recognized this readiness in different ways. The first and second athletes both said that they had had enough: one because of a "creeping" awareness of disillusionment and the other because she realized there were other alternatives. The third athlete stated that she'd had problems trying to be constantly prepared for irregular demands on her daily life. The disruptions to her work career became increasingly difficult to handle and by 1984, her decision to retire was permanent.

Related to these is another example where an athlete experienced a form of closure or reduction in her sport opportunities. She described her changing dedication from competitive sport in the following manner.

> I just started to think that it had to come to an end. It's not like I wanted it to happen like that. "No, not now, please!" That's the point where I knew my heart wasn't there the way I thought it should be. (018-19:69)

Similar to the previous examples, this athlete was caught by her waning sense of personal commitment to competitive sport.

A process, rather than a point of readiness is evidenced by a final athlete's response. She reported a year or more of unease before she finally stopped competing, an unease that was present during the Olympic Games! Her decision to leave sport was based upon understanding this uneasiness and making some changes. The finality of the decision about her readiness to retire was dependent upon the circumstances in which this decision had been made and also, was related to the athlete's commitment to the decision taken. However, in all the examples, athletes' descriptions illustrate that lack of money and other hardships related to sport seem to become more important, the sport goals become less important and although some cynicism is evident, it does not appear sport directed.

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[40] Concerning this study, four sibling pairs were named to the 1976 Canadian Team. Three were sister pairs. One was a brother-sister pair.

[41] It would be speculative to conclude that familial pressure may have been involved in the extended time it took the athlete to leave her high performance sport.

THE AGITATORS

The second type of disillusionment is reported by 'the agitators'[42]. These athletes expressed a cynicism or disillusionment that was directed against sport. Further, they had more troublesome retirements and did not view their experiences as satisfactory.

First, an athlete who described herself as 'the mouthy one' in her final competitive year, recalled how she learned to 'play the game' of high performance sport.

> In sport, you can go along and play the game with everybody...make sure you do the right things or, if you think you are right, you can try and buck the system. Unless you're pretty good, it's hard to buck the system. Just from experiences I've seen, three of my teammates tried to buck the system and it was really sad because it didn't work. It was then set up so that they couldn't make it (unselected). One of them won a sliver medal one year and didn't make the team the next. Playing the game is really important but towards the end, I didn't.
>
> I wasn't too happy about D. coaching because I wanted T. to coach us and they had promised us he would. And, I was being the mouthy one. All the other people were really quiet and here's me, pick, pick, pick. I felt I could do that because I knew I was going to do well and it was my last year. (002:105, 133)

The athlete was able to describe "the game", who held the power (coaches) and how she was able to agitate in her last year when others could not. The readiness to leave and the willingness to risk seem to be clearly related. The effectiveness of agitating the sport system is evidenced by the athlete was actually able to alter some of the conditions of sport competition in her final year.

A second athlete first watched a friend leave the team and then chose her final year to initiate changes about the coaching the other athletes were receiving.

> The coach said that she had to go. She was a really key player and I had been her warm up partner for one and one-half years. But the coach said that she'd reached her peak. She was a real agitator that last year and I think that is why he let her go. He was feeling pressure from her, questioning his coaching techniques and that was the problem.
>
> And myself, I became a bit of a shit-disturber. I did it for a couple of reasons. First, I thought, for my own good, I can't go back to the sport every year. It's not good for my career. I should really get on with my life, get money, get doing something. I really didn't want to go back another year. The second reason was the coach was lousy. I wasn't too impressed with the coach so I thought I'd do what I could to make the change. As captain, that was my responsibility. But also, I didn't have any reason not to. (012:62, 87)

Again, the athlete was in her last year and recognized that she would not risk the retaliation her friend had experienced because she would not be returning.

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[42] Athletes also called themselves "shit disturbers" and "people who rocked the boat"

This same pattern is repeated for an athlete in her final year of competition decided to file a complaint about the poor and disrespectful coaching she had received. She approached her sport association to file the complaint.

> We were told that basically we could fill in this essay and give it to the sports rep. It was supposed to be anonymous but it couldn't be because we were required to sign our names. The facts were then going to be compiled. How many people are going to malign their coaches when they are members of the selection committee? You could screw yourself in this sport. In my last year, I let it go. Very few could. In my last couple of years I guess I was a shit-disturber. Before then, the coaches were Gods. After that I started to think for myself and it didn't agree with the coaches. So, yes, I wrote and said what was happening. I hoped it would remain confidential but I didn't really believe it would. But, I had nothing to lose if they did find out. (024:58)

Her skepticism was not unfounded. Less than a year later, she heard that her report had been distributed, in its signed version to some of the people criticized in the report. Despite the promised anonymity, the athlete had stated her point of view knowing that she risked little because of the timing of her complaints. Once taken, the athlete's decision to retire allowed her to change the nature of her relation with her sport.

The fourth and final example is the story of how one athlete confronted the sport governing association in her final competitive year.

> In my last year, they decided to hold the selection trials in March or April. If you live on the prairies, you can't even get outside until the end of April. So I wrote letters and one long letter to Sport Canada and copied my local MP...must have been seventy-five people. I spent a day and a half drafting this four page missive about how unfair the selection was. One of the people I knew well said "You're going to land very heavily on your ass if you don't pull this off. That's it for you". I said, "That's it for me anyways" but I felt it was so unfair and they didn't need to do it that way. It was so discriminating and they were just a paternalistic bunch of jerks...so they changed the dates. They changed everything. Sport Canada said they could believe someone who had been on the team for seven or eight years and so, it worked. I couldn't believe it. I just about cried when Sport Canada phoned. (029:74)

In this example, there is a readiness to risk. The athlete actually managed to have a direct effect on the competitive conditions in her final year. Not only did she get the selection dates changed, but she made the team, went to Europe and managed to medal at the World Championships in her final year.

In summary, athletes described how the decision to retire, for some, may lead to behaviour which others view as obstructive or troublesome. The athletes suggest that even when unfairness is perceived, they feel unable to effect any substantial change except, perhaps, in their final competitive year. Therefore, when problems arise which athletes regard as serious, they are frequently in the position of leaving the sport.

Athletes described increased risk taking in their final competitive year. They were able to make their point of view understood and to change, to a small degree, some aspect of their own sport experience in that final year. This can perhaps, be regarded as a form of mutual disengagement where the athlete agitates and creates distance from the sport organization and the sport organization willingly lets the athlete leave the sport because of the agitations. That athletes' perceived disillusionment or cynicism is directed against the sport system is clearly evident.

Retiring With Loss of Motivation

Some athletes appear to have simply stopped. In these instances, it may be more accurate to say they withdrew or refused to go on. For some not fully articulated reason, the internal motivation that normally drives athletes to achieve their goals was gone. SOme described this as a vague that "something is wrong". For others, the imagery is more powerful and refers to "the fire going out".

Something is Wrong

As athletes continued to compete at the high performance level, some became aware of a tension between them and their relation to their sport. For some, retirement was immediate: for others, a long and slow process preceeded eventual retirement.

One athlete described a sudden and acute breakdown in her intent to pursue her competitive sport.

> There was just one day where everything got to me. I said, "Stop the practice. I want to leave". I just cracked up. I was crying and the coach said to take a week off and think about it. I did and at the end of the week, he phoned and I said that I wasn't ready to return. So, I took another week off and again he phoned and again I said that I couldn't do it. And that was the end of it. (009:63)

As she indicated, she "cracked" under the stress. Her inability to continue dealing with the stress or perhaps, her powerlessness to change it resulted in her withdrawal from the activity.

Another athlete reported a progressive attitudinal change which eventually led to her retirement from high performance sport. She had sustained an injury which forced her to take time off training. She reported that during that time off,

> I started to let go of seeing myself as someone involved in sport so my image of myself was changing from one who was always committed, excited and involved in sport and had a lot of fun to someone who was going to work

> hard and get what she wanted in her life and I was going to be real career oriented now. (011:77)

Her attitude towards herself as an athlete changed and a reduction in desire precipitated her retirement four months later. Identity definition appears important to an athletes' changing motivation and hence, to sport retirement.

A third athlete saw herself as an athlete and how that image changed.

> My poorer races were my harder races where I'd grit my teeth and think "I've got to beat them". My best races were when I felt calm and uncompetitive. I was aware of the race conditions, to be sure, and I was aware of my opponents. But there was a real calmness in me. They were honorable opponents. My coach always tried to get us to hate them, intimidate them and put as much distance between us and them as we could. But I couldn't do that. I was not better or lesser than them as people at the end of the race depending on the result. That is probably why I quit competition.
>
> I think it's just an odd feeling that something was wrong. That's how it started and then it took a while afterwards to know what it was. Something just didn't feel right. Initially, I thought maybe it was me. Maybe I am not trying hard enough. The other things were a bit vague and I couldn't pinpoint them. It took me a year and a half afterwards to understand what the cause was. So I got rid of it by leaving competition. (018-19:66, 84)

Here, the athlete described her attitude change towards competition and how this seemingly reduced her desire to compete. Lacking this desire, she left high performance competition.

In all three instances, the athletes described motivational changes which in turn led each one to take some action to withdraw from sport. There is, in each case, some measure of control over the *timing* of retirement although, compared to the first two categories, the degree of personal control is greatly reduced.

I Did Not Have the Fire

A number of athletes reported that they ran out of energy or did not have the fire to continue. For four athletes, a decreased involvement in the level of preparation or training time ensued and eventually retirement occurred.

One athlete described how repeated attempts to train for competitions eventually led to an understanding that she no longer had the fire necessary to train.

> I just don't have the time to train. I didn't have that time in March and April of this year. But also, I was fighting desire. I did not have the desire. I did not have the fire in me. I tried to go out in May and compete and it hurt too much physically. My body just couldn't take it. (007:108-109)

The athlete described not only a lack of fire for training but also, what kept that fire from burning. Lack of time, lack of desire to make the time and her body's inability to compete without adequate training all contributed to her inability to continue as a high performance athlete. Although she did not call it retirement, the athlete described a reduction in her sport activity.

For some, the struggle to remain in sport indicates much about their changing attitudes to high performance sport. One athlete described her rational assessment of continuing:

> "This is a bit silly", I said. "I've got one leg (the other was injured) and new equipment and an unbelievably awful course". The coaches had decided to go with me instead of someone less experienced. So I competed and did really well. We won the team gold medal there and that was just so nice because it wasn't expected. I went back to school on crutches and I managed. Really, the rest of the year I thought "This is it! I won't return." (029:79-80)

The athlete found that her desire to continue was overwhelmed by the problems of continuing as a competitor. She had competed for a number of years, won many medals and seen many parts of the world but her health was deteriorating and the costs of continuing were mounting. She re-assessed her commitment to the sport and decided that she would ~~not return.~~

Another athlete described her lack of desire to continue in the following way.

> You know yourself that sense of total fatigue...once you've had the feelings of complete total reaching inside yourself to race to your ultimate. I could physically reach it again but I know that mentally, I couldn't do it again. I couldn't hurt like that again. I just don't want it anymore. I'm competed out. My competitive drive was exhausted. (024:75)

For this athlete, the fire for competition had gone out. She was simply unwilling to hurt as much again and left the competitive aspect of the sport.

Finally, an athlete who considered herself to be a real competitor, found herself unable to train. The mental discipline that had guided her training and competitions in the past was no longer existent.

> I kept thinking over the winter, "I have to train. I have to". But, I couldn't do it. I couldn't train. So, I went to Europe and raced anyways...best Canadian with no training. So what I learned was that I was a good competitor but I can't train anymore. That was my last real competition. I was caught between two poles. One-half ~~really wanted to be on the~~ team and go on the trips. The other half didn't want to train. I was so busy then, trying to work and force my training...so busy burning myself out. The faster I spun, the more I kept my mind off my problems. I was terribly busy and terribly depressed.
>
> (020:56-58)

For this athlete, the strength of her competitive fire contributed to her burn-out and she found herself unable to manage even a minimum of training for her last competitive event. Further, the athlete describes a sort of internal combustion process whereby the faster she spun, the less she thought about her problems and the more forced her training became. She stopped competing after the Eurpoean tour.

In all instances, athletes described having little or no energy (fire, motivation, desire) to reach previously attained competitive levels. All of the athletes in this group seem to lose lose the drive which previously had motivated them to achieve goals associated with their sports. They did not describe a redirection to other goals or a disillusionment with the system. Rather, they described a reduced drive that led them to stop or withdraw from competitive sport.

C. THE COMPLEXITY OF DECIDING

To illustrate the complexity of the initiation of retirement as the athletes discuss it, the following vignette has been compiled. The relationships between the many experiences are complex and the vignette demonstrates the changing meaning of sport retirement over time. A very successful athlete, now approximately 35 years of age, discussed her sport retirement by making a number of references to her own experiences, and to those of her husband, sister and another athlete whom she had never met. Here, these are recorded in the order in which they originally appeared in the transcript. First, there is a statement of position about retirement status.

> Leaving ties with statements I've made to the media. I've declared that I haven't retired but I don't have time to train for the Olympics this year...but I plan on going on. (007:14)

Then the athlete recalled some of her past goals which had not been achieved.

> I was very bitter in 1980 but I'm really bitter now, 4 years later because 1980 didn't come off. I'm really bitter because I'm not prepared for Los Angeles (the 1984 Olympic Games site).(007:71)

> I've blown it. I'm not... I don't have that opportunity because I haven't taken advantage of it. Right now my energy is going in twenty different directions.
>
> (007:84)

> Before 1984, there were minor changes to my event. It was like suddenly those changes happened and before I got a chance to compete, suddenly I was pregnant. (007:103)

> I didn't have the depth behind me. I didn't have the necessary preparation.

> When I found that I couldn't make the team, I just thought "who needs the aggravation?". I feel like I have another two good years left in me if I can just get some kind of base back again. (007:109)

Then the athlete provided a glimpse into her competitive future followed by a new and somewhat different position about her leaving status.

> Yes. That (comeback) means I am going to have to eliminate a lot of things from my life. It may never happen though. (007:113)

> I sort of have left. Not really. I've got one foot in the door. I really struggle with this desire, this 'fire in the belly'. It's just sort of flickering...but it's got to be consistent and I haven't had that consistency. I've had lots of fluctuations. (007:138)

The use of a vivid metaphor to decribe the competitive flame that burned within her provides an image of the intensity of the commitment and the dedication required for athletes to be competitive at the high performance level. It also illustrates the athlete's continued struggle to become and remain competitive.

The athlete then recalled how other athletes had left sport. She interspersed these accounts with another glimpse of her future and some of the conditions under which she anticipated retiring.

> (These other two athletes) were athletically perfect for their events; they got messed up. One went through a lot of things and bared her soul to the press and a lot of people, the older generation still talk about it. We lost (both) from the sport. One later came back. So I learned a lot from those two. I saw what the media did (to them) and I vowed it wouldn't happen to me. (007:165)

> I'm going to be constantly reminded every time I'm (coaching) that I've never reached my peak.(007:171)

> If my body doesn't perform well, if it doesn't come through, then I have to say OK, I've tried my best. (007:174)

> (There was this guy), I can't even remember the guy's name but they did a long interview with him that I saw. In short form, he was an athlete training for the Olympics. He was married. One day he was training for the media. They were doing some story on him. He was a hammer thrower and on the last throw, he let it go too soon and it landed on the car with his wife in it. She survived but was in hospital for a year. He got totally away from the sport after that. One day when he was 44, he threw the hammer so that his teenage daughters could see what he used to compete in and he found he could still do it well. He came back after that and made another Olympic team. (007:181)

> My husband was released from (his sport). I told him to take a year off after that and to spend time building things and doing things that he hadn't had time

> to do. His age was against him. I was relieved...because now things are starting to come out. We know that he probably had cracked ribs as an athlete but he never knew it then. (007:187)

> Actually, I thought it would be difficult for him to make the transition. I'm having a harder time than I thought I would...and it's really shocking me to realize that it's me that is having the tough time.(007:193)

> Yes, my sister had a serious injury and she bounced back and made it to the National Team. She married a guy who didn't like the sport. She left prematurely and I think she'll never be satisfied that she did her best.
>
> (007:202)

Finally, the athlete refered to a third and different position statement on her retirement status. Here, the alterations bring to life the process by which the athlete sought to understand and name her experience of leaving high performance sport.

> I'm teeter-tottering right now because I love getting all those medals. I love what I do and I love all the other things I am now doing. Retirement is totally getting out of what you've been working at for so long and going on; like ending your love affair of whatever! If I stop being an athlete and continue as a coach or administrator in my sport, that's not retirement. I suppose you can say that I've retired as an athlete but I haven't because I am always going to be physical. Do you retire from sport to climb mountains? Does one ending mean that you get to begin all over again? I think they are all the same thing; athletic. (007:228-232)

> A big hole...that's my life right now. It'll be a relief because I can fill it again. It'll be with different things. (007:258-260)

Although the relationships between the many experiences are hidden, the vignette demonstates that the meanings of leaving high performance sport changed or developed over the time of the interview. Leaving is a complex and continuing process for this athlete. Quite early in the interview, the athlete described an apparent contradiction. She was not retired but also was not engaged in training for high performance competition. Initially she attributed this to the circumstances surrounding her particular sport; namely changes to her event and her acceptance of a full time administrative position in that sport. Concurrently, there was quite sudden changes in her personal life (pregnancy) and she reported that she still felt the effects of having been unprepared for the Olympic Boycott of 1980. Combined, these events led her to consider in the end to reject retirement.

The athlete's ambivalence towards her retirement standing was evident in statements made throughout the interview; "I have another two good years", "I sort of have left", "I'm teeter-tottering right now" and "I suppose...I've retired as an athlete but I haven't because I am always going to be physical". She dealt with her ambivalence by redefining retirement. Initially retirement was linked to her high performance capabilities as an athlete. Later (007:232), she redefined it as "totally getting out of what you've been working at for so long and going on". Since she continued to coach and administer within her sport, she regarded retirement as quite unlike her actual experiences of leaving competitive sport. In her view, she will never stop being physical and thus, can not be fully retired.

This indicates that perhaps degrees of retirement need to be considered. This athlete was in a transition between being a high performance athlete and being a retired athlete. If the transition was lengthy, then degrees of being retired must be incorporated into the research analysis. This also raises questions about definitions of retirement. The question may not be whether the athlete retired, but rather how she regarded her status in relation to her personal definition of the term. This understanding may have been formed by such factors as the negative apprehensions about the retirement of other athletes (husband and sister) and a sense of not having reached a peak or insecurity about her performance abilities.

This woman's retirement discussion is particularly important because the athlete was actually in the process of leaving at the time of the interview. She had been named to the 1980 team and had won at the "Alternate Games' but her goal had been to 'medal' in Moscow. She described that after that, the fire burned quite low and she never again managed to fuel it to burn brightly and consistently. At the time of the interview, she was preparing for the Olympic Trials in 1984. She had not reached her performance peak but wanted to and was willing to give her body the chance to prove its capabilities. She recalled her injuries; her inability to get a good annual training base since 1980 and her frustration at not knowing whether her body would prove strong enough for one more time. She felt that her technical skills were better than ever but that she lacked the essential physical training time. Also, her family responsibilities pulled her one way, her coaching and administration another. However, she still felt that she was capable of giving it 'one last shot'. Evidently, the very process of retirement is a dynamic and individualistic experience for athletes. Also, it appears impossible to identify whether an athlete has in fact retired other than by using athletes' personal definitions of retirement and self-designations.

One of the noteworthy aspects of the vignette is the athlete's apparent negative regard for the manner in which other athletes had left high performance sport. Two athletes in her sport were "messed up" and subsequently "lost" from the sport, although one made a "come-back". Her husband was "released" and her sister "left prematurely". Another athlete "got totally away" in quite tragic circumstances. The athlete portrayed in the vignette wanted to avoid those particular pitfalls if possible. For example, she indicated that she learned to be cautious when speaking with the media. Also, she was very insecure about her future performance potential. Because of her long history as an athlete in the sport (1970-1984), and her considerable experience with the leaving processes of other athletes, this woman seemed very aware of the potential for a negative retirement experience. She also appeared to want some control over how she was experiencing her own sport retirement.

Another noteworthy aspect is that the athletes in this study have little comment on the ideal or best way to leave high performance sport. It is possible that athletes do not have an understanding of the ideal way to retire. It may also be that only the best timing for when to retire (discussed in a later chapter) is understood. Clearly, more examination is needed.

D. SUMMARY

From the preceeding descriptions of athletes' retirement, some athletes decide, in advance, to leave high performance sport. Some are ~~able to~~ follow through on their decisions but others are not. However, the athletes' sense of control is important and athletes who perceive themselves as retiring with such control report less troublesome and more satisfactory retirements than other athletes.

Sport retirement appears to be a dynamic process over which athletes report varying degrees of personal control. Most frequently reported is control over *when* to retire. Control over other retirement circumstances such as where, why or how are not as frequently reported. Therefore, it appears that control over timing (when) of retirement is more likely than control over the how or the meaning of retirement.

Second, all the athletes made the decision to leave high performance sport over an extended period of time. Few of them recalled a single point of leaving. Rather, they decribed a more gradual process of recognition that retirement was going to happen in the future.

Third, decision-making about retirement appears to be only part of the process of leaving high performance sport. Often, athletes perceived control over leaving had more to do with when leaving would occur rather than how, where and why. In this way, athletes may be able to design the timing of leaving and influence (through agitation) how they experience the act of leaving.

Fourth, the readiness to leave was generally predicated upon what goals could be reasonably accomplished prior to leaving. Some athletes selected performance goals such as membership on the Olympic Team, the Pan American Games Team or the Commonwealth Games Team. Other athletes hinged the timing of their leaving on performance goals such as racing the perfect race or repeating previous wins. Still others retired with a disillusionment about sport which led them to substitute non-sport goals, direct their disillusionment against the sport system or to leave through a loss of motivation.

Fifth, the vignette confirms two characteristics of leaving stated above and introduces three more. Confirmed were 1) leaving as a process which includes an awareness of retirement, decision-making about retirment and the act of leaving and 2) leaving as a dynamic process rather than a static event. Of the characteristics of leaving introduced in the vignette, the first is a feeling of ambivalence around the lack of control over the decision to leave. The athlete felt differently about her leaving at different points of her passage through retirement and she chose to deal with the dissonance created by her fluctuating position by adjusting her definition of sport retirement. The second characteristic revealed by the vignette is evidence that different degrees of leaving may be experienced by a single athlete. The athlete may leave from high performance sport for a short period of time (a "time-out"), may take a substantial length of time away from competition and then return (a "come-back") or may reduce and increase the level of competitive involvement according to personal preparation and goals (an interrupted athletic career). Two questions arise: how permanent is an athlete's retirement? and does each reduction in involvement in competitive sport constitute a retirement? Third, from the vignette, it was discovered that some athletes had a negative opinion about retirement before they actually experienced leaving themselves. The athlete in the vignette had information about a number of sport retirements that had not been good experiences for the athletes concerned. These may have 'set the warning bells ringing' about the negative meaning of retirement. When the athlete found herself in the process of leaving high performance sport, difficulties arose. However, her concerns may have become a self-fulfilling prophesy. The true meaning of retirement is not yet well enough understood to make such conclusions.

Clearly, the nature of decision-making is critical to how retirement is experienced and recounted. The athletes who discussed making choices about their retirement perceived themselves to have some control over their experiences. Both the nature of those choices and the perception of choosing are important to athletes reflections about retirement. For those athletes able to follow through with their plans for retirement, leaving was reported as a positive and untroubled experience. However, for those unable to follow through, the perception of control was an important distinguishing feature of satisfactory or troubled retirements. Also, in athlete's recounting of their retirement experiences, there may be some degree of "painting the retirement picture" in a more positive light. That is, athletes may reflect upon control they wanted to have rather than actually did have. In a comparative way, it would be interesting to examine the perceived control of athletes actually in the process of leaving high performance sport with perceived control influenced by reflections upon retirement experiences over time.

V. CHAPTER FIVE: INJURY AND ILL HEALTH

A. INTRODUCTION

Chapter five is the second of a four part analysis of how athletes report leaving high performance sport. This chapter examines three closely related conditions; *sudden relatively acute injuries, chronic and/or cumulative injuries* and *ill health* and then explores the emergent characteristics of these conditions.

Well removed from the grouping of data that appears in chapter four, another conceptual area emerges from the athletes' perceptions about their lack of control over their leaving experiences. Particularly well represented in this material are injury and ill health experiences which contribute to leaving. This chapter is centered on that material.

Athletes describe having little or no control over leaving which is characterized by physical incapacity as a result of injuries, health problems or some combination thereof. Fully two-thirds of the interviewed athletes linked injuries and/or ill-health to their leaving experiences. Simply through frequency of its discussion, physical incapacity can be regarded as one of the significant reasons for leaving high performance sport.

There are a number of different forms of physical incapacity which have impact on athletes' leaving experiences. Discussed here are a) sudden, relatively acute injuries, b) chronic and/or cumulative injuries and c) ill-health. No injury or illness appears as solely responsible for an athlete's retirement but in conjunction, one with the other, they certainly contribute to the conditions of athletes' leaving experiences.

Sudden, Relatively Acute Injuries

The occurence of sudden, relatively acute injuries seems to signal or trigger athlete retirement. Three examples illustrate that while a painful and severe injury does initiate retirement, the leaving process does not begin immediately upon injury.

The first example is provided by a 1976 Olympian who left her sport as an international competitor early in 1980 despite being a prime candidate for the 1980 Olympic Team.

> I sprained my ankle very badly. The timing was bad, two weeks before the Commonwealth Games Trials in 1978. I was running down an icy hill and fell. I iced it and wrapped it and did the trials anyway. I did a really good time. It was probably the best race I ever had. Then, two weeks later, two days

> before the second trial, I sprained it again, same ankle. It was the first time in my life that something like that had happened and I didn't know how to ask for support. I was so upset. That was one of the leading edges for me. It was the psychological turning point for me in my whole self image.
>
> There was just so much realizing that...well I trained for the Commonwealth Games . I really decided to go for it and I trained super hard, twice a day and worked hard through the whole winter. I had every indication that this would be my best season ever. So, for the first time in my life, my own personal expectations were very high and I made a real commitment to the sport. Before then, it wasn't 100%. Then this injury happened. I didn't know where to go or where to turn. I remember them being really dark times.
>
> I got physio (physiotherapy) and tried to run on it. I trained with it taped and probably pushed it more than I should have, in hindsight. I guess if I had clearer communication with my coach, I'd have known that I could have missed the second trial because I had already made the team. But, I competed dismally and cried afterwards. I wanted to go and hide for the rest of my life. When I found out that I had made the team, I felt like a fraud. Like, when I made the team in 1976, it was luck, then I was coasting on it for the second time (1980); on the results from 1978 and 1979 after the injury.
>
> (011:68-73)

From this interview segment, it appears that when the injury occurred (timing) and the severity of the athlete's injury are important to this athlete's estimation of her future performance potential. Although the first injury was not perceived as serious enough to keep her from racing, the re-injury seemed to have considerable impact because it occurred just prior to an important performance goal for the athlete. As such, it was perceived as more severe because it affected her ability to achieve these competitive goals.

Interestingly, the self worth of the athlete seems to be a critical factor in how the re-injury affected her. For the researcher, this is indicative of the importance of the link between how the athlete was named to subsequent representative international teams, in this case, the 1976 Olympics and the 1978 Commonwealth Games. It also points to the significance of early athletic experiences in the meaning or interpretation of later events. In this case, feeling "like a fraud" casts meaning on a potential retirement event such as an injury.

This athlete did not leave her competitive sport until early 1980, but she indicated that the injury was enough to put her into a minor depression and for the first time in her life,

> suddenly, the two ways I saw myself, as a student and as an athlete, were no longer going to be there. I started to let go of myself as someone involved in sport. That identity started to change or get lost when I got injured.
>
> (011:77-87)

This illustrates the time lapse between the injury event and the actual leaving events and also introduces *identity* as a concept of possible importance to sport retirement.

The second example illustrates how complex an injury situation can be. This athlete was involved in a very extensive, and in her words, exhausting training program for two years before 1976. Her injury occurred immediately before the Olympic Games.

> The day before we left for Montreal, I was so tired, I was hyperventilating, almost passing out. When we finally got into the village, I got a little rest and the hyperventilating stopped. Then, at the last practise, (the coach) called for "one more set" and even though we all said "no", we did them. I heard this "spring-pop" in my ankle and I ended up with inflamation on the bone.
>
> So, at the Olympics, I had pain and they were strapping me. They had a mix up about who was medical staff and who wasn't, so they wouldn't even let me see my own doctor. They tried all kinds of things. Finally, a French doctor came over and he said "all she needs is cortizone" and they said "we can't in case of the pee test" and I just broke down. "This is ridiculous" I said. So finally they froze it and I played.
>
> By the time I left the village, I had an infection in the joint as well. It was nasty stuff. The freezing would wear off during the competition and then they'd shoot it up again because the pain was so intense that I couldn't stand it. I couldn't walk so they'd shoot the needle through the tape. How was I supposed to know? They were the doctors! Finally, near the end of the competition, I wouldn't let them near it. My lips and fingers were becoming numb and I couldn't see the whole court or the score clock. It was just a joke. I was so fatigued that all I did was get up and go to practice or a game and say "one more ball, one more ball". The Olympics for me was just another tournament. That's all. People ask me and I say "It was just one more tournament. It just happened to be the last one". (030:37)

Again, it is evident that the timing and severity of this injury is important to the leaving experience of the athlete. Further, this athlete was not well treated. In spite of the athlete's efforts to warn her coach about her dangerous fatigue levels, the training intensity was not reduced and the injury resulted. The medical treatment she received was inconsistent and exascerbated the injury. Her performance at the Olympic Games was severely compromised and she still harbours considerable anger over the pre-Olympic and Olympic experiences she "endured".

Apparently, the severity of the injury takes on a new meaning when the timing is critical. This athlete, like the one in the first example, pressured herself to perform again as soon as possible after her injury. Thus, what may have originally been a moderately incapacitating injury is exascerbated into a severe injury. This athlete took "a long rest" after the 1976 Olympic Games and, although she did play internationally for one more year, she "had enough" and never again sought to reach such a high performance level as in 1976.

The third example illustrates how a serious injury at an inopportune moment can be viewed as "a minor setback" despite the potential long term incapacity that may result.

> The training was so hard that I'd develop little injuries so I could get time off or get through some of the drills. They weren't real injuries, I suppose, just sort of mental ones. Before the final cut in Montreal though, I had quite a serious ankle injury and I thought I'd be cut on the spot. So I worked every drill I possibly could and the coach kept me. There was fear in those days though. I knew I was one of the last three and being injured sounded like a death bell to me. So I probably still have ankle problems now because I was afraid of being cut then. God, I worked that ankle. You have to do what you have to do! (014:141)

This athlete succeeded in staying on the team and the Olympic Games were her final competitions.

The timing of the injury made it difficult for this athlete to continue competing for a place on the team. However, the short term benefit of "making the team" far outweighed the pain of playing while seriously injured. The athlete reported that she did not consider the potential long term costs at the time.

Again, the timing and the seriousness of the injury are interrelated. This athlete acknowledged the crucial timing ("before the final cut") in the same breath as recounting the actual injury ("quite a serious ankle injury"). However, in the subsequent description of the implications of the injury, she concentrated on how hard she "worked that ankle" explaining that she "had to do what [she had] to do". It seems that this particular athlete would have continued to play on the team unless she suffered some injury that was much more debilitating. Thus, when the timing is crucial, even serious injuries can be perceived by determined athletes as minor setbacks.

Comparisons between these three athletes' injury accounts lead to interesting conclusions about sudden, relatively acute injuries and athletes leaving high performance sport. First, all three injuries are ankle injuries. Although this appears coincidental, it may be explained by the nature of the sports in which those athletes participated. Logically, injuries to the legs (knees, ankles, feet) would prove more debilitating to an athlete in the sports of basketball, volleyball and track and field for example, than in the sports of swimming, rowing or trap shooting. Second, all the athletes described the injury event in relation to the amount of time remaining until the next major competition. The "serious" injuries occurred within two or three weeks of "the final cut" or "Olympic play". Third, and related to the second, the perceived severity of the injury appears to be as much a function of when it occurred (timing) as the nature of the injury, i.e.: the shorter the time available for recovery, the more severe the perception of the injury. Fourth, the athletes recall being generally unconcerned about the long term effects of injury mis-management. Instead, they "pushed it" or "worked that ankle" as quickly as possible. In light of the proximity of the Olympic Games, the preference appears to be "short term gains for long term pain". [43] Fifth, two of the athletes describe some difficulty with sport "professionals" during the critical healing phase. In the first example, the coach failed to inform the athlete that she had already qualified for the Commonwealth Games team and that another trial was unnecessary. By returning to competition quickly, she risked and incurred further damage. The second athlete recalled that the doctors could neither agree on who should treat her injury nor in what way it should be treated. Also, they subsequently created the conditions for exascerbating the injury. Both athletes seem to place those problems alongside the other negative factors which were part of their athletic career. Even in retrospect, neither athlete seems to give any particular import to the imperfect role of the "professionals". Finally, specific to retirement, all three athletes left high performance sport in the season in which the injury occurred. However, each managed to perform at the high performance level after the injury but before leaving.

The effects of sudden, relatively acute injuries on the leaving experiences of high performance athletes are complicated. The timing of the injury, particularly in relation to the length of time until the next expected performance, seems to impact on the athletes' perception of injury severity. The closer the injury to the next expected performance, the greater the perceived seriousness of the injury. Also, although the injury occurrance may signal retirement in the near future, the athletes' rush to compete again appears to take precedence over potential long term damage to the injured area. That is, the apparent risk of long term damage or competing while in intense pain seems minor in light of the next performance goal. To explain, some of the athletes suggest that the next performance goal was or became the last performance goal. As one of the three athletes described,

> We were just left limping along afterwards...and it was just one more tournament. It just happened to be the last one. (030:37, 59)

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[43] A common slogan for training is "short term pain for long term gain". It is unfortunate that the reverse should become more true for these athletes injured just prior to peak competitions.

Clearly, sudden, relatively acute injuries affect the leaving processes of some athletes in a very specific manner by triggering or signalling impending retirement.

Chronic and/or Cumulative Injuries

Some athletes experience less acute and/or more chronic injuries. Over the span of an athletic career, individual injuries of the recurring or cumulative variety can become debilitating for high performance athletes. However, not all injuries need be regarded as "the ringing of the death bell" (014), since many injuries are one-time occurances with only short term effects. However, as discussed in the previous section, acute injuries are or can be perceived as being more serious in the presence of a short recovery time before competition. Even the chronic and/or cumulative injuries may be understood in the same manner.

Chronic injuries seem to signal impending retirement if they occur or re-occur in training and competitive situations. For example,

> The ankle injury almost did it in for me. I injured it before the pre-Olympics and it was January or February of 1975 when I really felt I was moving ahead. I was peaking physically and starting to get stronger. I was starting to catch up to the other girls but D. and I were the smallest of all the girls and we didn't get the same training effects as some of the other "he-man" type girls got from lifting weights. They were just genetically more endowed than us. So we just worked hard and that was when I tore the ligaments and it set me back for 3 months. I had a cast for 4 weeks and I went to every practice. I went through a few casts because I tried to keep my defence up. (014:80)

This athlete related the injury event to a time in her career when she was "catching up". Rather than allow the injury to heal and then return to practice, she returned quickly so that her "setback" would be less severe. There is some indication too that she perceived herself as different from those women who clearly made the team. These differences emphasize her sense of distance and perhaps, her marginal status in relation to the team.

Her next statement explains her understanding of the dynamics of becoming and remaining a team member.

> I felt I might get kicked off...if I didn't get better fast. I can remember that A. was catching up but she was still young and had started to make great strides then. So that was sort of the beginning of the writing on the wall for me. I think in the pre-Olympics, I was still a starter but I could see her catching up fast. I was hobbling and petrified. The panic started...and I thought "Oh, God". (014:81)

The injury appeared to signal that the athlete was approaching her (potential) performance limits and that retirement was pending. Thus, the athlete appeared to be hanging on against time, debility and increasing competition for her position. In actuality, the athlete left high performance sport due to more serious injury to the same ankle more than a year later. It was the chronic nature of the injury which appears to have triggered her anticipation of leaving high performance competiton, though not the immediate act of leaving.

From another perspective, the signal from chronic and/or cumulative injuries can be perceived as a "ready to use" criterion for leaving. As the following athlete projects, her back problems will be her basis for sport retirement[44].

> I have no doubt about physical potential but if my body doesn't perform well, if it doesn't come through, then I have to say OK and accept it. I think my body can if I get fit. I have always had back problems. It's structural. I just don't bend in my lower back and it creates muscular tension and I get the normal "out of whack" and I go to the chiropracter and get it straightened out. I've noticed too, for years, that I'm getting a few nagging injuries that just can really take 2 or 3 weeks out of my life. But that's because I'm trying to come-back in spurts without the physical preparation. (007:174, 175)

For this athlete, there is a single chronic problem. It is not really an injury nor an illness but a structural back problem. The athlete's retirement hinges upon "whether the back will come through".

Also, the impact of the nagging injuries as retarders of her training attempts was evident. As a result, for this athlete, leaving competitive sport does not have to involve the leaving of a 100% commitment but may involve leaving something that has already become less of a commitment because of chronic problems. That is, when this athlete does leave high performance sport, she may well be leaving a "come-back attempt" rather than a 100% commitment.

Injuries may not always be singular occurances but may lead from one to another or be cumulative. Two examples follow which concern cumulative injuries. One leads to leaving, the other does not.

> My biggest problem was tendonitis. We frequently had to jump into the (sport) cold...with no warm-up. Also, I went to the chiropractor after getting a self-inflicted whip-lash from a standing long jump that one of the coaches had us do. I jumped so far that I hurt my neck. I don't know why we were jumping but we did. I broke my ribs water skiing by jumping off a ramp at the end of one season too. I was six weeks immobile. I broke my ribs twice more too, once in 1975 and once in 1978. In 1975, it was three weeks before the National Championships, too. I could barely race. Oh yes, I cracked five vertebrae in skiing at the World University Games. That was excruciatingly painful. I couldn't ski-race after that. (016:91-94)

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[44] At the time of the interview, this athlete was undecided about whether she was retired, taking time out, making a come-back or simply continuing at a reduced competitive level in her Olympic sport.

This athlete experienced a number of relatively severe injuries through sport. Although all were sport related, only a few of the injuries (tendonitis, whip lash and broken ribs) were directly related to training or competition in her Olympic sport. However, in spite of all these injuries, she did not leave high performance competition until 1980.

Curiously, this athlete had already experienced a sudden, acute injury that marked the end of her competitive skiing career. The other injuries, incurred over the next decade, were more minor in nature. Even broken ribs did not keep the athlete from competing at the National Championships. Thus, while these injuries may have "slowed down" the athlete's progress and contributed to "time-outs" for recovery purposes, even in combination, none was significant enough to signal the athlete's retirement.

The second athlete describes a number of injuries, some very serious, which cumulatively signal retirement. [45] In 1972, the athlete suffered a minor injury which prevented her from making the 1972 Olympic Team.

> I broke my ankle in the final selection trial. I was on a horse, this is the same old story, someone else's horse that I got at the last minute. That's what happens. (029:5)

Then in 1975, a new coach was assigned to the equestrian team:

> ...she herself had had an accident and they said she'd never walk again and typical of her, she was up and walking in six months. She had parts of her spine fused. (029:31)

The athlete and the new coach struggled to get along and, in the battle of wills, the coach asked the rider to jump a course in which two of the fences were mapped out backwards[46].

> That was a black period in my career. (I was) in the hospital for six months just before 1976, bless her heart...The horse and I had a spectacular fall and I was caught underneath the railroad ties of the jump and I thought that I would drown and I began to worry. Once I got my head above water, I started to worry about my horse drowning. But, I swam to one side and managed to coax him into swimming under one side of the fence and getting out. He was just a wonderful horse. He sort of got himself out and I got up and I just felt like everything in my body had sprung. It was a very strange feeling. And, as I hit the ground, I thought "You made a wrong decision a week ago, baby and now you're going to pay for it". I really felt that it was something that I

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[45] In this example, the injuries were sustained by the athlete and her mounts. In equestrian sport, the health of the horse is likened to the health of another athlete and both horse and rider perform as a single unified entity. Since the meaning of the injuries to the athlete is context bound to such a high degree, they are presented here at length and in the order in which they occur within the interview text.

[46] That is, the horse had to jump from uneven rather than even ground and from high to low ground over a fence that presented a sharp vertical face rather than the more usual gradual inclination.

> contributed to.
>
> Well, I got up and what I felt mostly was I knew that one of my legs was broken and I sort of had all my weight on my left leg and as it turned out, that wasn't nearly the most serious part. Both my knees, everything, ligaments, cartilage, everything was totally gone. My arm, my wrist, my collarbone and my right leg were broken. I guess I was in shock. We were at the far end of the field and the coach said "Now, you're all right?" and I said "I don't feel all that well." She said, "Well, I'd like to finish" and so I sat in the jeep for 3/4 of an hour feeling more and more ghastly while she finished the training session. We bounced around from place to place and my concern was to get back to the barn so someone could take my boot off. Sure enough, when my boot came off there was this terrible mess and the bone was sticking through.
>
> So someone phoned the ambulance. They were getting me out of the jeep and I said, "Just be really careful and don't drop my heel" because I thought my leg would come off. In the excitement, someone did and I fainted. When I came to, the ambulance attendants were there and they were giving the coach holy hell because they could see right away that it wasn't just my leg...but my knees and everything else. Plus, I'd been in the muddy water!
>
> (029:33-38)

The injury occured in the U.S.A. so the athlete had to be flown back to Canada where she spent the next six months in hospital. She had major surgery during that time and went through extensive physiotherapy. The accident happened in June of 1975 and the coach was removed from the position shortly afterwards. Of the period when she was in hospital, the athlete recalled

> There was a woman in my hometown who looked after my horses and she kept them ready for me. By December, I was back to riding. The other thing was that I had this perverse desire to go back. The team hierarchy (Sport Governing Organization) didn't believe I could come-back. (029:40)

The "come-back" of this athlete was difficult and painful. Against considerable odds, (the seriousness of the injuries and the time remaining until team selections for the Olympic Games) the athlete was successful in being named to the six member Olympic Games Team.

It appears that an athlete's goals are crucial to the degree to which leaving high performance sport is considered. The equestrian athlete's accident would certainly qualify as acute and sudden injuries and would likely be sufficient to end the competitive pursuits of many. However, for the athlete, serious injury was insufficient to cause changes in the ultimate goal of making the Olympic Team. The strength of those goals combined with "a perverse desire to go back" and a "come-back" being unexpected contributed to the athlete's actual "come-back".

The equestrian athlete's account of her injuries does not end in 1976. In the equestrain events, both the wellness of the rider and of the horses needs to be considered. In the following two years, 1977 and 1978, the cumulative effects of the injuries to the rider and the health of her mount became more evident.

> I just competed out west in 1977. My horse's lung condition got worse and worse and I spent a fortune trying to figure out what it was. Just a real heartbreak. He'd get 3/4 of the way around the cross country course and then he'd almost start to rattle. I had various vets give him all kinds of treatments but there was drug testing on the horses so we had to be very careful that this was outside the competition. I thought, "This is just insane. I'm supporting all these horses. What am I going to do? I'm 27 years old and all this!" (029:57-59)

The athlete expresses her concern for the health of her preferred horse and both financial and time costs of competitive riding. The horse was "put down" the following year.

> He (the horse) was killed in the 1978 selection trial. He developed the rattle and I thought I'd have to pull him up. It was very slippery and it had rained the night before. He slid into a fence and I pulled him out. One hind leg - the whole tendon system had slipped off his right hock, so that was it for him. I hoped to save him so that at least he could retire but I wanted to shoot him right there because of the pain he was in. He'd been just a wonderful horse.
>
> (029:78)

The saga of injury and illness for the athlete and her horse does not end with the tendon problem. The athlete subsequently travelled to eastern Canada to compete in the trials for the Canadian World Championship Team. Again, she was injured.

> Down east, I rode just one horse. Then I re-injured my left knee. I'd had a couple of bad falls earlier in the year when I was training a young horse. My brother (a doctor) told me that if I kept riding like this, I would end up wheeling around in 5 years. I was only walking along carrying two pails of water and the next thing I knew, I was on the ground looking at the sky. The next day, I was getting out of the camper and I fell down the stairs. Then I went over to get my horse for the event and I fell again. It was 5 minutes before the time trial and I knew I was in trouble. I quickly got my leg bandaged and went around the course in record time, finished fourth and was the top Canadian so I made the team.
>
> Meanwhile, I had this knee that was just impossible. They announced the results and called for a doctor at the same time. They pumped me full of stuff so that I could get through the stadium jumping but it was all very painful. They made me a brace to get through the World Championships and I had it operated on after the World's, during the Christmas break while I was at school. We won the gold at those competitions. It was unexpected and I felt really good about it.
>
> Yes, I managed to keep things together until my horse died, then that was it. It was like going back to square one agian. I was on crutches for that whole second year of school and I just managed. Really, the rest of the year, I thought "This is it". (029:80)

The athlete managed to win a gold medal at the World Championships while she was injured enough to be awaiting an operation to reconstruct the ligaments of her knee.

There are a number of characteristics about this athlete's leaving experiences which are illustrative of the cumulative impact of injuries. Three specific points seem particularly important: (a) foreshadowing, (b) acknowledgement by the athlete (turning points) and (c) the importance of athletic goals.

(a) Foreshadowing

With regard to foreshadowing, this athlete was aware that she could not continue indefinitely and that her body would "give out" in a matter of time. The warnings took several forms. Her brother warned her about the impact of numerous injuries on her mobility. Each injury or fall she experienced was a warning about the limits of her body to withstand recurring injury. Finally, the continued cost of competing was acknowledged as an obvious drain on her financial and time resources. Clearly, there were limits to the length of time that the athlete could continue to compete at such an intense level.

(b) Acknowledgement by the Athlete

Further, the athlete acknowledges that she shared in the responsibility for some of the injuries and that she was aware of the 'wearing down' that was occuring. At one point, she commented "You made a wrong decision a week ago..., and now you're going to pay for it" (029:57). To continue from that point was a tremendous struggle. Later, she indicated the insanity of continuing to pay for the costs of health care for her horses when they were beginning to 'wear down' (029:59). Thus, she recognized her responsibility for and awareness of the costs of her athletic pursuits.

(c) Importance of Athletic Goals

Finally, there is evidence of an underiding and forward moving current provided by the athlete's sense of future goals. This woman displayed what can only be termed as an exceptional tenacity for continuing her athletic pursuits. She explained the tenacity as part love for the sport and part "perverse desire to go back".

Comparisons are possible between the two athletes with regard to sport goals, context of the injury event(s), injury history, seriousness and duration of injuries and whether retirement resulted. First, both athletes suffered a number of injuries including at least one severe injury. However, the severe injury was not enough to end either of the competitive careers. One athlete found herself unable to compete in skiing and switched to another sport. The other returned to the sport in which she had experienced the serious injuries. Second, the athletes took as little time off training as possible after each injury and, in some instances, continued to train and compete while injured. Third, the cumulative effects of each athlete's injuries were dissimilar. The first athlete was able to continue in high performance competition after the injury until she decided that at 30 years of age she wanted to be a wife and mother. The other athlete found herself unable to continue competing without risking debility of a more serious nature. Combined with the length and success of her athletic career, the injuries appear to have hurried her to the end of her competitive years. Finally, it appears that even severe injury may only keep a competitive athlete out of training for a relatively brief period of time. The determining factor of the initiation of leaving when injured is primarily whether, in fact, the athletes hope to continue.

In chronic and/or cumulative injuries, it is evident that an athlete's perception of the acuteness of any injury is closely linked with when the injury occurred. Further, injuries can be perceived as more acute if they occur in close proximity to a major competition. Also, an injury which occured while an athlete was 'catching up' or 'had forward momentum' may be regarded as more debilitating than would otherwise be expected. For example, a moderate injury may be seen as the signal of reaching one's potential and may be interpreted as "the writing on the wall" or the initiation of leaving. Certainly, the perceived seriousness of injuries is directly, though not totally, attributed to when injuries occur.

Additionally, in chronic and/or cumulative injuries, past injury experiences impact on when athletes leave competitive sport. In the two examples where athletes suffered injury, each returned to competition at the international level. From these athletes it was learned that there are different levels of involvement, i.e.: athletes don't have to be at a 100% performance level all of the time...only at crucial competitions (selection trials or championship meets).

From these four athletes, it would appear that their chronic and/or cumulative injuries "hurry them along" to the end of their competitive years. Although the injuries may not be severe, they are major contributing factors in the leaving experiences of these high performance female athletes.

Ill Health

About one third of the interviewed athletes discussed ill health in conjunction with sport retirement. Ill health took several forms and is a contributory rather than a primary reason for leaving high performance competition. Athletes generally discussed ill health in three ways: some related illness to high fatigue levels during training; others experienced ill-health which stemmed from problems not specific to sport involvement, and still others experienced diet-related difficulties which developed through athletic careers.

First, several athletes discussed ill health as a result of levels of fatigue. In one instance, the account did not result in retirement although its potential to do so was certainly acknowledged.

> Talk about trauma in one's life. I was studying so hard, I was working 18 hours a day on my studies and on the computer and my vision got really bad. I had to wear these special glasses. My vision was really going. It was always blurry and talk about panic! It would have been so hard to continue in (my sport); to adjust. I live through my eyes. (006:47)

In this example, conflicting interests led to what the athlete regarded as a debilitating injury. Her sport involved performances largely dependent upon her acuity of vision.

Another athlete developed problems which contributed more directly to her retirement.

> I was sick (mononeucleosis) before the games, too, but then I felt I was in the momentum of things. Earlier, when my coach had kept me separate from the National Team, I was outside like an outcast.. It was so nice to be part of it all for a change. I trained after the games, but my training was half-assed because I still had mono and also because I found it hard to listen to the coach anymore. So when I got back home from Montreal, I was burnt out of the sport and I was also sick. If I had been healthy and strong, it might have been different. You know, how can someone who trains for 6 hours a day ever be healthy? (018-019:196)

This athlete qualified for the Olympic Team despite the mononeucleosis. She then left the sport before the next season because she couldn't "get back on track" (018-019:197). The illness was not the sole reason for her retirement but, in conjunction with the coaching problem, it was sufficient to initiate leaving.

The third example of fatigue-related ill health as a contributing factor to the leaving process poignantly illustrates how ill health can develop over an extended period of one's athletic career. The implications of long term fatigue, and in this case, long term ill health are illustrated.

About one and one-half years prior to the Montreal Olympics this athlete suffered a stress fracture in one leg[47].

> I had a stress fracture for 6 months before the coach would understand. I played all 6 months on it. Finally, I got a cast put on and then the coach came to look at the x-rays. It was only then that he believed me. He still wanted me to come to practice. So later, I came with a cast and watched. Then, he said he needed me so I got the cast taken off and started to practice. Once I started, my leg would go numb and the bump got bigger and the leg got smaller. I walked and cycled and did weights and was on anabolic steroids because I had damaged the nerves in my leg and sometimes steroids helped. So I got hair on my face and lost my voice. I used to be able to sing but my voice went so low and I think my larynx is damaged. I've lost half the range. Anyway, my leg didn't get better so they put me on an electrical stimulator. Even now, I have to be careful. I can't run on pavement and I get a sick feeling in my stomach and a bad taste...it's a warning. (030:65)

From this example, the long term effects of both injury and treatment (anabolic steroids) are introduced. The athlete continued to play at the high performance level despite the seriousness of the injury and as a result, incurred damage to her larynx and her leg.

Prior to high performance training, the athlete suffered from ulcers and had indicated that she had "always been careful" in order to avoid a reoccurence. However, she desperately wanted to make the Olympic Team and that...

> kept me going when I'd be just so tired and so sick. I was anemic through a lot of that time. I had iron shots and everything but they didn't help. I was 145 pounds but I was so strong. I didn't eat enough. I was so tired that I wasn't hungry. That went on for one and one-half years and finally, when I quit playing, I put on lots of weight. I'm sure that stress will show up later in all our (other team players) lives. (030:29-31, 54)

At this point, the injuries and the ill health (being sick, anemic and never hungry) combine to instigate retirement. This is similar to the cumulative injuries discussed earlier in this section.

In the above examples of fatigue-related ill health, the contributions to individual athlete retirement is varied. In no instance are they described as the primary reason for retirement.

The next two examples of ill health and retirement are those in which athletes come into sport with health problems which eventually take their toll on the athletes' performance. The first example illustrates that athletes with asthma and allergies can compete at the Olympic level, i.e.: that the conditions are not necessarily debilitating.

> I have asthma and many allergies like you but I think I've got mine reasonably under control. I never used my inhalator unless absolutely necessary. My

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[47] This is usually caused by repetitive stressful jumping and is related to the amount of muscular fatigue that any bone structure can withstand.

> injuries were a lot more of a problem. I pulled my ribs in the summer of 1978...those injuries and those allergies always nagged and I just had to be really careful. (002:189, 223)

This athlete managed to control her problems and was named to both the 1976 and the 1980 Canadian Olympic Teams.

In the second example, the athlete constantly sought to gain control over her allergies and asthma. For her, it was an uphill struggle and a relatively minor injury was sufficient to initiate her retirement.

> I have a lot of allergies and a touch of asthma. I am allergic to chlorine too. So, I have built up a resistance over time. Walking around is okay but if I am around a dog I have difficulties breathing. So, during the Pan American Trials in 1975, I had to scratch from all but one event. It was pretty bad then.
>
> Also, I used to get my period during competitions. I got used to feeling crummy at the Pan Ams, the Olympics, Nationals; it was like clockwork. It was no big deal. Even at the "Friendly Games" in 1975, I was feeling crummy, diahhrea and stuff, and I thought "I must be more nervous than I thought about my race". I set a Commonwealth and Canadian record in the race and the next morning I came down with German measles. That's what I had been feeling. But, since I'd been so used to feeling badly, I still raced well. You don't believe you are sick when you are used to feeling badly all the time. I just believed that I was too nervous. (024:24)

In contrast to the first example, this athlete's allergies and asthma were only partly in control.

> We weren't allowed to use anything without the team doctor's okay. We had our vitamins checked, ear drops, eye drops, everything. So when I didn't use my antihistamines, I'd fall back on chlorotriplon even during competition. But during international competition, I wouldn't use anything. I'd try not to use my inhalater and I had my drugs with me but never used them. I don't know why but it seems that every international trip I was on, I was the one who was tested. They usually tested the medallists and they'd test others at random. But, whether or not I won a medal, they'd test me. (024:23, 32)

This athlete frequently competed in less than optimal health and sometimes found it necessary to scratch or withdraw from some of her international races even after qualifying.

It took only one relatively slight injury to signal the end of the athlete's competitive career.

> Three weeks before the trials in 1978, I got bursitis in my shoulder and couldn't get the strokes smoothly. As it got worse, I got a couple of cortizone shots and some ultrasound treatment everyday but it was a viscious circle of "rub, inflamation, shots, rub". My shoulder lasted through the Commonwealth's but not through the World's three weeks later. I swam only a few events. I couldn't stroke evenly so mentally it was really tough. I told my coach that I would try but I said "If you're on my back once, I'm gone. I've had it. I don't want it anymore". I just wondered what it all was about. It had all become such a game. (024:38-40)

It seems predictable that this athlete would indeed have trouble adjusting to "yet another problem". In similar fashion to athletes who experienced acute or cumulative injuries, this athlete continued competing until the next major goal was reached; in her case, the Commonwealth Games[11]. Again, neither the allergies nor the asthma seemed sufficient to signify retirement. Yet in combination, with each other or with a minor injury, impending leaving was indicated.

In both examples, the athletes suffered from asthma and allergies and each incurred at least one injury. Also, each athlete competed in sports which demanded a very high degree of cardio-vascular or aerobic fitness. The significant difference between their leaving patterns appears to be degree of control. Although one athlete was always 'nagged', she could always perform. The other found her health (not her fitness) sometimes limited her performance. Thus, although it cannot be said that continual health problems lead to retirement, if the problems are uncontrolled, the athlete may be left more susceptible to the effects of other leaving factors, particularly injury.

The third and final set of examples about ill health concentrate on diet and/or eating problems which bring about sport retirement. A large number (25%) of the interviewed athletes discussed such problems and many linked the root of their problems to sport. Three particular examples have been chosen to demonstrate two findings. First, some athletes candidly discussed their eating problems in connection with anorexia nervosa or anorexia / loss of appetite. Second, links between diet-related problems such as anorexia and the self-perceptions about depression, injury and sport retirement are evident.

The first example concerns an athlete who experienced an injury, depression and loss of weight in the short space of three months in the autumn of one year and suddenly retired the following spring.

> I was never really satisfied with all those races. There was a lot of wavering. I didn't realize it then, but looking back now I see that I was in a minor depression at the time. Nothing was really interesting for me. That fall, I was really depressed and I lost a lot of weight. I started to let go of myself as someone involved in sport. That identity started to change or get lost when I got injured. When I quit though, jogging was the way I still had some control in my life. Food was another because I lost a lot of weight, from 125 to 108 pounds, in that depression. It was clinically diagnosed not as anorexia nervosa but as anorexia - loss of appetite. (011:77-94)

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[11] Although the athlete did not discuss control over the retirement experience, there is evidence that she was able to at least control the timing of leaving. This points to the difference between perceived control by the athlete and the researcher's awareness of a possible *control* situation.

Here, it can be seen that each one of the problems was not sufficient to signal leaving sport but in combination, they were manifestations of the athlete's search for control. Also, the problems were dependent on one another. That is, the injury was linked with depression as was the loss of weight. All contributed to the process which the athlete identified as "starting to let go of [herself] as someone involved in sport". It may be that for this athllete there is no single reason for leaving sport.

Further, the athlete sought to maintain some degree of control over her life as her athletic identity started to waver. This, she accomplished by monitoring food and exercise, two things she learned to monitor well as a dedicated athlete. Importantly, her control related more closely with how she was feeling rather than how she was performing. For another four months, this athlete maintained a "shadow" [**] training and competition regime before she felt controlled enough to confront her coach with her decision to retire. Her account of her retirement starts only at this point.

Another athlete labeled her eating problems as anorexia but linked them to a different lack of control. She recalled that

> Really, 1976 was such a false existence. It was so much so, that I became obsessed with what I ate. If I would have eaten better and had some support then, I wouldn't have gotten so anorexic. Then, I broke my toe training in the sand. Add to that that I pulled a groin muscle maybe from being a little bit anorexic and trying too hard. Really, my body was just burning itself out.
>
> (020:40-49)

She had some control within her false existence but felt that she had no connection with her real life, her husband, her work, her friends and her family. The consequences of what she did were suspended as well. It didn't matter how well she performed. Further, she felt coaches were uninterested in her because she was not a potential medallist. Thus, her preparation for the Olympic Games in 1976 was less than optimal. She was barely in control and her body was "on the edge" of being unable to perform at all.

When this athlete arrived in the Olympic Village, she continued to struggle in her false existence.

> Then, I hardly remember the Olympic race. I wasn't into it. I remember going to saunas twice a day and weighing myself four times a day. I was totally caught up in what I weighed. If I was lighter, I might race faster. I was eating nothing, maybe a yoghurt all day and I was just wasting away. I was training

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[**] Shadow training is going through the motions of training but not focussing on improvement. Athletes also call this "coasting". Only athletes with an established base of skill and fitness can "coast".

> really hard but with that pulled groin muscle, my coach gave up on me. I was just lost in Montreal. There I was at the Olympics with no coach and also doing crazy things like trying not to eat all day. I was basically anorexic but I was at the point where I thought I was fat and, you know, I weighed 96 pounds. They (M.O.G.A.P.) were doing a study on percent body fat and I remember saying to myself "I'll do that but I won't eat for two days, so when I go in there, I'll be the lightest, strongest pound for pound athlete". My coach had always made a lot about weight. "You're too fat", he'd say. I started to lose weight in 1970 (104 pounds), then in 1972 I was 101 pounds and in 1976 I was 95 pounds and going down. I did the best competitions in my life between 1972 and 1976 and I felt like I was on top of the world! (020:58)

The athlete's self-labelled obsession with weight was one way in which she controlled living in the artificial world. Much as her sport training, her eating control was characterized by a high degree of tenacity and of aloneness. As she described, she was on top of the world but it was a false world. What also appears to be true is that the athlete took her coach's maxim to it's greatest extreme; that is, she was able to control her lightness and strength. By extension, she thus could not be faulted for failing to perform well because of extra weight.

It is well documented that athletes who suffer from anorexia or from food deprivation continue to perform exceptionally well, even in international competition (Wheeler, 1986). It had taken a quadrennial, only four years, for the athlete to get 'out of control'. Despite the extreme measures of food deprivation, the athlete was able to perform virtually identical times in both 1972 and 1976. This was done despite her own personal recollections of feeling that her body was 'burning itself out'. This is probably a tribute to her tenacity as a competitor. In the media, she was frequently referred to as 'the little tiger'.

To complicate the situation, this same athlete was plagued with amenohhrea throughout the major portion of her athletic career. Although not uncommon among high performance female athletes, little was known about the actual physical condition or the social and psychological side effects.

> I had no periods at all since before 1970 and didn't ovulate at all. I was caught in the anorexia - weight gain cycle at the same time. Even now I don't ovulate. It took five years of depressions and eventually some medical help before I could become pregnant. (020:58)

It is clear that long term physiological effects of high performance sport training need research attention, particularly with respect to anorexia and amenohhrea and links between them. Also, the relationship between athletes' sense of control and anorexia nervosa or anorexia "loss-of-appetite" are apparent and the proximity of that relationship to sport retirement bears further examination.

The third and final example raises questions about the process of dieting among young athletes. In the case below, the athlete's eating cycles were well established by the time she reached 14 years of age.

> Even at 13, I knew that I was dieting wrong but nobody ever talked to me about how to do it right. They just told me to lose weight. I knew too that the conditioning and the dieting should somehow go together. There was no one to pull it together, though. So when I really started in this sport, I was really skinny and I didn't do any training outside (outside the actual coached sessions). I think it really contributed to a whole lot of injuries I had as a kid. I was always getting hurt. I hurt my neck and back and shoulder and arms competing...I didn't know that I was supposed to build up. I'd been hurt over and over again. Now, 8 years later, it's permanent.
>
> I missed a year when I was 13 and 14 because I had glandular fever or mono, I'm not sure which. Physically, I feel that I was never in really good condition. At the Olympic trials, I didn't know whether I'd even make it because my arm and shoulder were really bad by then. I was getting cortizone shots in my shoulder and then I'd sit on the sidelines and wonder, "Am I really going to make the team?". I don't feel I ever reached my potential.
>
> (013:16,31-33)

For this athlete, the food issue does not appear to be one of control. Rather, she links together the lack of assistance with diet and the similar lack of an overall training program.

At this point, a parallel can be drawn between the leaving processes of injured athletes and the impending retirement of this athlete. Athletes recalled that some injuries were serious enough to prevent optimal preparation for the Olympic Trials. Combined, the diet and injury problems intensified over the final two months before she moved into the Village.

> During that time, I was only capable of training for maybe 45 minutes to an hour each day. The other girls were working for five to six hours but my injuries wouldn't let me. The rest of the time, I was in my basement room with nothing to do but watch the soaps and get really depressed. I also ate a lot of chips and sour cream in those two months. I put on twenty pounds! I just couldn't work any harder and I was alone and unhappy; so I knew it would be my last competition.
>
> At the village, there was no manager or anyone to help us. To occupy my time, I'd eat all night (24 hour restaurants in the Village) and all day I'd starve. I was so relieved when the competitions were over. The media was not very nice to me. They spent 4 or 5 lines saying how many of us weren't good enough to even have been at the games. If they'd have talked with me, they'd have found out about the painful shoulder injury and back injuries that made it difficult for me to perform. Not that it's an excuse. We really did work to get there. But how good we were never got a chance to show up. (013:64, 87, 91)

This athlete did not score as well as predicted at the Olympic competitions and immediately after her event, she signed out of the Village.

> I fell during my event. Up until that point, I was doing really well. I missed the

> finals by a fraction of a point. I walked out of the venue (competitive site) and never went back. I couldn't work any harder because of my injuries. You know, and all the other team members were catching up to me and I just couldn't do any better. I did the best I could but I don't think I even came close to my potential at the Games. Really, it was one of the most lonely times of my whole life. (013:55, 87)

The essence of the athlete's recollections had to do with eating cycles, inability to perform, injury, loneliness and depression. It is impossible to separate them and subsequently draw conclusions about which have more to do with sport retirement than the others. Instead, it should be noted that the athlete herself indicated that 1976 would be her last year. The athlete could not control her eating binges, could not train or perform more because of injuries that wouldn't improve, and could not deal well with the isolation or the ensuing depression during that time. Thus, the eating cycles were only one of many interrelated parts of this athlete's leaving experience.

In summary, three points are clear. First, a similar 'lack of control' was evidenced in all three examples of eating disorders. From this, it is possible to conclude that relatively serious eating problems did (do) exist among some high performance female athletes[50] and that such problems influence sport retirement. The mediating factor seemed to be a 'lack of control' in some areas of the athlete's lives. The attempt to 'be in control' took the form of either eating cycles or abstinince from eating at times when the loneliness, depression and 'lack of control' were greatest. Second, there appeared to be no hesitancy among the athletes to discuss anorexia in a candid manner. Any reluctance or perceived stigma about anorexia seemed absent. Because of the more recent medical and media attention to eating disorders, it is impossible to ascertain whether the athletes would have utilized the same interpretations of their retirement immediately after leaving as opposed to nearly a decade later. However, the candor common through all interviews would suggest that although different language may have been used, the athletes still would have discussed the eating disorders. Third, similar combinations of events signalled retirement for the athletes with eating problems. In all three cases, injury followed by depression accompanied the anorexia. Further, the impact of that combination of circumstances seemed to be intensified by the nearness of the Olympic event or another major competition. Some athletes literally find their control of their destiny to be slipping away. Leaving sport is one solution. But, for two of the three athletes, the nearness of such major competitive goals seemed to be reason enough to delay retirement until after such performances.

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[50] Anorexia seems to be an aspect of the athlete subculture.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF LEAVING

The characteristics of leaving revealed through the examination of injury and/or ill health are substantively different from those discussed in chapter five. A number of athletes experienced physical incapacity brought on by an injury or ill health. These athletes report having little or no control over the impact that such events had on their subsequent retirement. What little control they did have was evidenced by the fact that virtually all the injured or ill athletes recovered enough to compete in at least one more international competition before they left high performance sport.

Second, and related to the first characteristic, is that the perceived seriousness of injuries had a direct impact on the timing of athlete retirement. The seriousness of the incurred physical disability was perceived to be greater when little time remained before the next major competition. Even if an injury was perceived to be serious by an athlete, riskier short term solutions were generally sought so that the athlete would be able to compete in the next major competition. The negative long term affects of the "quick come-back" were often negligible but sometimes resulted in long term disability. In any case, injuries frequently initiated sport retirement, although usually it did not take place immediately.

Third, some of the retirements which were initiated primarily by injury or ill health were impermanent. That is, athletes made "come-backs" in the same sport, shifted to other competitive sports, or even shifted to lower competitive levels within the same sport. Similar to the retirements where athletes described having more control (chapter five), leaving high performance sport can be regarded as having different levels and degrees of permanence.

Fourth, the cumulative effect of injuries and/or ill health are clear. A readiness for leaving may be foreshadowed by or even caused by a physical 'wearing down' over time. Some athletes left permanently. Others found a change of involvement level or sport to be sufficient.

Fifth, the momentum of an athlete's career at the time of injury or illness may reflect a certain readiness to retire. Athletes who described a certain readiness (the accumulation of injuries, the false existence) experienced an accelerated form of leaving. Those reluctant to leave high performance sport hinged their time of leaving on future competitive goals.

Finally, virtually all the athletes who reported injuries and/or ill health managed to compete after the injury or health problem but before leaving. This suggests that even with serious injuries, athletes with a strong desire to continue competing will do so if at all able. Although efforts to get 'back on track' were hampered by slow or incomplete recovery, some athletes risked long term disabilities in order to achieve short term, athletic goals.

In conclusion, it seems that acute and/or sudden injuries, chronic and/or cumulative injuries and ill health all impact on sport retirement. However, rather than being in a direct and causal ralationship, injuries and ill health seem to operate in a contributory fashion with regard to retirement. That is, a single injury or illness was insufficient as a signal of retirement. Rather, each contributed to athletes' overall readiness to leave sport. Thus, athletes' goals and the timing of injuries and/or ill health did in fact contribute to the initiation of retirement.

VI. CHAPTER SIX: BARRIERS TO CONTINUED PARTICIPATION

A. INTRODUCTION

Chapter six is the third of a four part examination of how athletes account for leaving high performance sport. In this chapter, three new conditions of retirement are introduced; *obstacles to continued participation, physical and social pressures to leave* and *appropriate timing*.

Clearly, the characteristic of control is not a black or white designation. Many athletes describe varying degrees of control, some of which are similar to the degree of perceived control described in chapter four, others of which are similar to the lack of perceived control described in chapter five, and still others which fall between the two. This chapter is a description, in a catch-all fashion, of those conditions of retirement which emerge but do form relatively exclusive categories such as those in chapters five and six. Rather, these categories show considerable overlap with the earlier chapters and with each other, yet are sufficiently distinct to be presented separately in this research. Although the characteristic of control is prominent, the athletes do not perceive it to be the most important descriptor of their retirement experiences.

This chapter discusses the ways in which continuing as a high performance athlete is made difficult and in some cases, impossible. The element of perceived control by athletes is considered to be important as some athletes report "deciding to leave because there was no other choice". Like chapter four, the descriptions of some of the athletes' leaving experiences focus on personal control in decision making. However, the situations in this chapter also contain elements of coerion, that is, pressure from outside the athletes. Similar to chapter five, this chapter examines both the situations in which athletes leave high performance sport and their perceived lack of control in those situations. However, the situations examined here are generally exclusive of the injury and/or ill health conditions of leaving.

The chapter contains three sections. The first, *obstacles to continuous participation*, explores the circumstances which prohibited athletes from further high level competition. The second, *physical and social pressures to leave*, concerns the factors in sport and non-sport life that effectively limit further participation by athletes.

The third, *appropriate timing*, describes the athletes' awareness of a best retirement time. Together, all three sections provide a rich description of the 'push and pull' dynamics of being involved in and of leaving high performance sport.

B. OBSTACLES TO PARTICIPATION

Obstacles or barriers often existed in the path of the athletes which effectively prevented their continued participation in high performance sport. The obstacles reported by the athletes fell into three roughly defined categories: general rule changes, sport governing associations and politics. While considerable overlap exists between the three categories, each is loosely held together by commonalities.

General Rule Changes

There is a quadrennial cycle to the organization of high performance sport. The continuous repetition of the pattern of international competitions and preparations for such competitions lulls athletes into a certain degree of comfort with the rules governing their events, sport regulations and team sizes. Athletes described changes to the ongoing pattern as being disruptive to their continued involvement in high performance sport.

One example of rule changes concerned the actual running of the events in which the athletes expect to participate. If the event changes, or perhaps, is absent from the list of events at national or international competitions, the athletes are faced with major adjustments. One athlete recalled

> I wanted to establish a good ranking in the world in the pentathlon but I didn't get to do that in 1980 because of the boycott. Then, suddenly, the heptathlon came into being. I competed in the heptathalon only once under really devastating conditions, windy and the whole bit. I haven't done the event since 1981. And so, I'm frustrated now because I have a lot of competitive experience and skill but I haven't had time to train for all the events. (007:104-106)

And another,

> So, I was nervous for the year because I hadn't done my best time for more than a year in the one and only event I could make it in, the 400 I.M. {individual medley}. The 200 I.M. had been taken out just for 1976. Well, I didn't have a hope in anything else. The times were fantastic at the Olympics and I never did get back to the time I did there. (024:38)

Both athletes found themselves in the unenviable position of trying to learn more or different events in order to continue competing. Sport is very specific and, as such, it is extraordinarily difficult for athletes to make adaptations such as learning two more events or performing in longer or shorter events than those for which they are trained. The pentathlete found the changes to her event to be difficult to overcome and, in fact, only competed once in the altered version of her event. At the time of the interview for this study, she was occasionally competing in single events such as long jump and shot put but did not return to her former high performance level as a competitor. The other athlete, a swimmer, managed to qualify in the longer event despite her expertise in the shorter but unscheduled event. She managed to adapt for the season (1976) and returned to competitions in her preferred event in the following two seasons. The athlete suggested that had she failed to qualify for the Olympic Team in 1976 because of the event change, the pattern of her leaving would have been drastically altered.

A third athlete commented on the effect that drugs (particularly anabolic steroids) changed her understanding of the sport in which she participated.

> There were other things happening in my sport. A lot of athletes were, in my mind, taking steroids. Whether they were or not, it was leaving a bad taste in my mouth about the sport. I was becoming really conscious of the politics that were going on and I wasn't satisfied with that. Finally, I said, "I don't want to play this game anymore". (011:82)

The athlete was injured at the time she considered the illegal use of drugs. Although the use of drugs was not the only reason for her leaving, it certainly was part of her rationale. If the standards of the sport and her participation in it were not as rigorous as she desired, then she no longer wanted to participate. In one way, the athlete can be seen as disengaging from her sport: injury and discontent being her rationale. That is, if the sport was perfectly satisfying, why would she leave? If the sport was less than perfect, perhaps it would be easier to leave. Whatever the reason, the athlete chose to incorporate increased drug use and political activity in her rationale for leaving.

Other rule changes mentioned by the athletes involved variations in the size of teams selected to participate at Commonwealth, Pan American and Olympic Games. In 1976, the fact that Canada hosted the Olympic Games greatly increased the potential team size. However, the team sizes for subsequent major games varied greatly even in particular sports.

On the positive side, one athlete decided to continue at the international level once the 1976 host site was announced.

> Three of the players made the 1971 Pan Ams their last trip. It was just after that that Canada was awarded the 1976 Olympic Games and I knew that if I could continue in the sport, I could definitely make that. It was a real turning point for me. (015:40)

Thus, the longevity of her high performance career was enhanced by such an announcement. Another athlete found that the Canadian Olympics had positive short term effects but negative long term effects on her athletic career. With the Canadian site guaranteed, her sport association organized a National Team program.

> In 1975, because the team was starting, we didn't have much to do by ourselves. We didn't do that much. We would train together weekends mostly. The coaches tried to introduce a little weight training...but we had no experience with weights. So, I tried... (003:28)

It was not a strong program and subsequent to the 1976 Olympics and the 1977 World Championships, the status of the National Team program became doubtful.

> We knew that if there was supposed to be a team, there would be a project, but they gave us a negative answer. All the way along they were saying, if there is going to be a team, it will be a men's team. By 1979, they were putting a lot of money into the men's team but not anything into the women's team. So we already knew there would be nothing. The message was clear.
>
> There was no protest about that. Everybody was upset or disappointed but it was all along obvious. For the Olympics, that's the only time they tried to put something together for women. (003:80-81)

The athlete did not retire from her sport. Rather, her high performance sport left her. She participated in the sport for a number of years after 1977 but was never again presented with the opportunity to compete internationally.

Her analysis of the whole experience is worthy of inclusion at this point.

> I think, at that point, there was really a strong support for the men's teams in the sense that the federation and, at that time,there was an ego in men, the men's team, and "these are my boys, these are our boys" and I didn't really feel that at that point but now, I realize that (there are) teams organized for men. One of the administrators told me "maybe you should organize that for the women". They were not 'for' the women. (003:165)

The athlete's personal analysis includes a perception of gender descrimination. The sport governing association, upon which she had previously depended, proved unhelpful. She thought they may even have been the cause of the discriminatory programs. The athlete was given a choice: organize an entire national level program for women in the sport or pursue the sport at a less competitive level where programs still existed. Since it is almost inconceivable to remain a high performance athlete and develop a national program, the athlete chose to continue playing but at a reduced competitive level. Both 'choices' amounted to retirement from high performance competition.

Other athletes also reported that their teams were disbanded or cancelled for periods of time which made it difficult for athletes to remain part of the program. For example, two athletes were involved in a sport in 1976 but in early 1977, the provincial sport governing association declared bankruptcy. The equipment owned by the association was sold to recoup some of the losses and all the paid staff were released. This effectively reduced all opportunities for athletes in that province to compete in the sport unless they relocated to another province.

One of the athletes from the 1976 team recalled

> I thought that I could get organized to take some time off...and in it, I could take a leave without pay. So I arranged that for 1977 but after the Games (Olympics), the provincial federation went into bankruptcy and there was nobody there to keep it together. So, we didn't have a coach and I was by myself. Everybody quit after 1976 and so I was by myself...not even a federation. So I thought, well, there's nothing I can do by myself.
>
> (004:64-66)

She found herself with time off to train and compete but with no equipment, program or coaching. The other athlete, in the same province, recalled much the same events.

> I stopped in 1976 after the Games (Olympics). My coach was gone and there was nobody to train with. So sometimes, with somebody, I could go to the club and train but I couldn't do it seriously by myself. I needed the organization and the coach. (023:13)

Curiously, both athletes described themselves to be alone, even though they lived in the same city, belonged to the same club and knew each other quite well. Also, both responded quite differently to the bankruptcy. The first athlete worked at re-establishing the sport at the club level; organizing a new series of races and developing an administrative base from within the sport community. She remained involved for a considerable time afterwards and even competed as an athlete at the World Master's Games in 1985. The second athlete chose to continue competing and changed sports to do so. At the time of the interview (1985), she was beginning to get re-involved in the original sport as a recreational instructor.

These two athletes illustrate that even in virtually identical circumstances, athletes responded differently to perceived obstacles to continued participation: one athlete left competition as an athlete but continued to be involved in the sport, the other continued as an athlete but left high performance competition in her sport. Clearly, individual differences in the nature of sport experiences from which athletes retire must be addressed.

The final example is of an upset in the quadrennial cycle of one sport's developmental and competitive programs. One of the 1976 athletes experienced the series of disruptions in the National Team program throughout the years between the 1976 and the 1980 Olympic Games. At the beginning of that quadrennial, the athlete was totally committed to the sport. At the end of those years, she was not involved in the sport at any level. Her experiences are unique from her team members', particularly during the last two years of the quadrennial. Her recollections candidly describe both the nature of some of the obstacles barring the athlete's advance as a competitor and the tenacity with which she resisted leaving.

First, the 1976 Olympic Team in this sport had experienced a particularly long and intensive training program which involved a two to three year commitment from the athletes prior even to their consideration as members of the 1976 Team. One athlete recalled that immediately after the Olympic Games

> ...the team disbanded. In 1977, we tried to get the team back together. It was difficult. I was committed until 1980, but the women's team all went home and the money from Sport Canada dried up. So, suddenly there was no income and no Sport Canada support. I had no income and no (training) program. So, basically, I looked around, got a job on the oil rigs in Alberta...until I had enough money to come back to my (homebase) where I then started a club. (015:55)

She continued to play competitively through 1977 and then accepted a one-half time coaching position for the 1977-1978 academic year. She returned to the National Team for the 1978 World Trials.

> I thought it would be like 1975-1976 all over again...full time training and then, on the way back from Moscow (1978 World's), I could take up full residence to do the training. On the way home from the championships, (the coach) cut two of us from the team. He thought I was too outspoken and a challenge to his ultimate authority. He said we needed younger players with a good team sense. (015:81)

She reflected upon her status as an athlete at that time.

> I just wanted to continue playing. I hadn't retired, it was just that this program fell out from underneath me. I was on this mountain and all of a sudden, there was no mountain anymore. (cited in McLaughlin, 1982: 14))

Her sudden reduction in player status left her in a quandry.

> I had to decide either to leave sport or not to leave sport. I was just finishing up a degree in the psychology of sport on coaching, so coaching was sort of an easy way to go. That's when I went to the (sport governing) association and started to check out coaching possibilities. I found out about the apprenticeship program. So, another door opened. That was a definite

decision-making process. (015:84-85)

The transition from athlete to coach was difficult for the athlete. First, she relocated to another city. She wrote her Master's thesis, established a new personal relationship and began coaching a new team all in the same year. She recalled being in control and and out of control and on the thin edge of a breakdown during that intense year.

> There were lots of times in the six months after that when I thought I was going crazy. I really would come home and not know whether I'd be in good spirits, writing and working hard, or ripping papers and saying "I have no mind. I'm only an athlete and I'm not even that anymore". I didn't have a breakdown in terms of not being able to manage my life, but I went through a series of emotional crises trying to find out who I was going to be if I wasn't going to be an athlete. (015:86)

The identity crises were powerful moments in her memory and she suggested that she still felt the weight of being 'forced' into the identity of a non-athlete. However, she did manage to secure another coaching position, this time at the National level, and was progressing well until, in the spring of 1980...:

> I was thrown out for being a lesbian. But it wasn't a question of my ability or how I did the job or even my relationship with anybody in the sport. It was who I was. It is like your being fired for having blue eyes. So, it made me realize...one of the heaviest realizations was, that there wasn't support for women in sport. The support system wasn't there. It also made me realize that (1) if you are a lesbian and (2) if you are a woman in sport in any kind of position where you can be called a lesbian, you are out in the cold. So, it made me think I don't want to continue to be involved in sport. I don't want to administer. I don't want to coach. I don't want to be involved in any part of the sport discipline unless I am actively involved in changing it. (015:89)

From the athlete's perspective, she was confronted with one obstacle after another until she was left out of the sport entirely. In her relationship with the sport governing organization, she seldom experienced real choices and felt that she lacked personal power throughout. Even the coaching position was taken from her. The researcher again finds the concept of *identity* to be of probable importance to sport retirement.

In her description, she considered that her coach had posessed only minimal power. The real 'power-broker' was the sport governing association. She saw the source of the obstacles to her participation to be that sport association. At the conclusion of all her sport involvements, she reported that she had been totally expendible to the association and that she now had a great distrust for administrators in the association. At the time of the interview (1985), she remained bitter and disillusioned about her sport experiences.

In summary, athletes described participating in programs at the high performance level with certain goals, expectations and commitments. When changes were made to rules, events or programs, athletes considered themselves to be 'the ones left out in the cold'. Retirement from the high performance level of competition frequently followed. The athletes described themselves as unaware of plans to disband or disrupt the quadrennial flow of events and sports until they were personally affected. Thus, there is a sense of being caught unawares by obstacles which then limit the participation of the athletes at the high performance level. Also, the athletes were unanimous in their recollections about being unable to do anything to alter the situation so that they would be able to continue competing. This, in effect, is powerlessness.

Those in the positions to make decisions were regarded as the powerful. In most cases, the powerful were either the governing association or Sport Canada. Coaches' power was generally limited to the application of certain rules; a sure, safe and legitimated authority. Athletes who were accountable for their performance results were dependent upon both coaches and sport organizations for the opportunities to do so. Thus, the controlling style of high performance sport organizations and coaches appeared to provoke a rather cautious, "don't rock the boat" attitude among the athletes (Kanter, 1977).

Finally, these athletes discussed the obstacles with which they were confronted as if they were quite independent of the skills and performance abilities at the time. It may be that the athletes were reluctant to discuss, or did not believe that their abilities could be less than acceptable; i.e.: considered themselves to have more competitive years remaining. For the athlete who then became a coach, she perceived her firing to be independent of her coaching skills.

Overall, the athletes described being able only to react to the situations that were obstacles for them. There remained but one decision, to retire, because they saw themselves as powerless to challenge those who placed the barriers before them.

Sport Governing Associations

The sport governing associations are generally large organizations with a small paid staff and a large volunteer group who effectively coordinate the development of a particular sport in Canada and field competitors for the major international games. In 1976, most (if not all) of the associations were dependent on Sport Canada, and therefore the taxpayer, for their funding.

With the announcement of the hosting of the Olympic Games by Montreal in 1976, the sport governing associations concerned with Olympic sports underwent a period of rapid growth. New athletes and coaches were identified and Sport Canada coordinated the various programs for the development of a strong competitive base in those Olympic sports.

Some athletes recalled that their retirement from high performance sport was the result of struggles between the coaches and administrators of their sport governing associations. Many of the leaving experiences resulted from attempts by the associations to 'clean house'.

Although most often done privately, occasionally the problems of team membership were aired publically. One athlete was a National Team member from 1974 until 1977. She recalled that her first 'real thoughts' about leaving came about through a reading of her coach's public comments.

> The coach announced in the national sport magazine that he felt happy with the new players but dissappointed with some of us, the veterans. I think he felt he wanted to clean house and there were a lot of good Junior National Team athletes coming up...It was a cheap shot on his part. (027:76-77)

The athlete left the National Team shortly afterwards and began coaching at the high school level.

In the second example, a mass leaving resulted. Representatives of the sport governing association commented negatively about the National Team's performance at the Olympics and specifically criticized the players for "not working hard enough".

> After our competition, the association president came up to us and said we really hadn't tried hard enough. We hadn't worked hard enough. We all just looked at him. He was so wrong. We all just sat there until one athlete said "We have tried so hard, given our best for three years and you can't come and tell us today, on this last day, that we haven't given our damndest". The president walked out. That was our goodbye, our thankyou and our "hope to see you again". I remember saying "F.... this nonsense. I'm never playing again. You bastards. Who the f... do you think you are?" Everybody was just so fragmented by it all, that we all went off in our own directions. We were so tired, we simply didn't care. (030:42-43)

The athletes on that particular team had worked so hard for so long that the fatigue was ever-present. At the Olympics, they were as disappointed as anyone about the results, but they certainly felt they could not be faulted for "not working hard enough".

The individual athlete's reaction to the ill-timed criticism was predictable. She responded angrily by leaving the team. The team simultaneously disbanded. However, she did return to international competition and did not retire until 1978.

> I had already retired officially at the end of 1977 but the coach asked me back on an interim basis to play only if necessary. He wanted me to be assistant coach, too...It was good for me because I had to attend fewer practices and make fewer trips. The sport association had already made the decisions about who they wanted and the coach was having a difficult time convincing them that he needed me. The association had not requested any of the Olympians back for an interim basis until the team was strong. So the association wasted us, all of us.
>
> We were actually better the year after the Olympics. Time is a great consolidating factor and our skills, particularly our mental skills were much stronger than earlier. And, we had such physical reserve. We could get in shape very quickly. But the association was unprepared to use us and the coach insisted on it. They wouldn't let him so he retired. There was no one left. The association had to start the program all over again. Conceptually, it makes no sense. No other team in the world does it. (030:47-50)

Several comments this athlete makes are very important to the discussion of leaving. First, she officially retired in 1977 but came back to play in the world championships in 1978. On the surface, the facts of her leaving appear straightforward. However, when the athlete recalled the experience in more detail, the following picture emerged. The athlete retired but returned at the coach's request. The sport governing association did not approve of her role and informed the coach. The coach waited until the end of the competition tour and then told her and several other players they were no longer team members. With the more detailed description, the lines of decision-making became clearer. The athlete understood the situation regarding her leaving to be one where the sport governing association had more power but less expertise about the development of high calibre players. As a result, her criticism was directed at the problems created by short term planning, lack of skilled role models for developing players and the distance of the sport governing association from the real activities of competitive sport. She concluded that the sport governing association was too impatient to ever see their investment in players to come to fruition.

Though the comments reveal little about the athlete's personal response to leaving in both 1977 and 1978, they provided information about the annual logistics of constructing a competitive team. Plus, the athlete was involved in what might be called an interrupted rather than continuous sport experience at the time she was told to leave the team. The cyclical rhythm of her experiences with her sport illustrate that athletes too may come and go, sometimes fairly and sometimes unfairly, but still the program goes on.

The intermittent involvement of the previous athlete was similar to the experiences of another athlete in a different sport. The next quote comes from a highly successful athlete who consistently placed in the top four in the world in her sport between 1977 and 1984. As her experience increased, so did her awareness of the minimal degree of control she possessed over the nature of her participation. Her difficulties began when she started to make decisions for herself rather than deferring to the sport governing association.

> The association was giving us (she and her teammates) trouble for not going to the training camp. We hadn't been notified of any testing and yet they were demanding we drop training and go to the camp. It was almost as if we won the world championship medal and then they kicked us under the carpet. I didn't fit the mold. So, they repeated "You must go to the camp" and I went on a vacation with my Grandmother instead. The tickets had been booked for ages. "If you are going to screw around like that, fine. I won't compete", is what I told them.
>
> Fortunately, Sport Canada started giving the association a bit of flack because they had come up with this program but Sport Canada said "Where is your top team?" They had a psychologist for one of the other teams but they didn't have us on their list. Sport Canada came through and I competed that year. I'd have stopped entirely though. You see, I enjoyed the sport. I really loved the sport. But I'm not going to go through all this bullshit. If the agony starts overcoming the reward, then you don't do it anymore. So I was stopped! We had to train and to fight the association to get what we knew was best for us. (026:71)

The athlete discussed "not fitting into the mold" and ~~certainly,~~ as a medal winner at the world championships, she was unique. However, in a sport governing association, programs were organized to be followed. Great individual differences were apparently not tolerated. In the power struggle which ensued, the athlete quit the sport and re-entered the program only when the association came around to her way of thinking. Sport Canada was involved in the struggle partially because of the past successes of the athlete. The athlete, it seems, was able to reduce the problem to a simple equation: "if the agony starts overcoming the reward, then you don't do it anymore". In this case, the athlete only left sport for an indeterminant length of time, until the sport governing association[51] reduced its demands and instead, supported her efforts.

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[51] Sport Governing Associations are sport specific administrative organizations which plan and conduct the business of the associations. Among their responsibilities are athlete identification and development, National Team selections, training programs, monitoring programs for athlete development and administration of financial assistance.The sport governing associations are generally housed in the National Sport and Recreation Center in Ottawa, Ontario.

Intermittent membership on the National Team was also the experience of another athlete. Her periods of time away from the sport were considerably longer and she reported retiring many times. First, early in her sport career, she was taken off the team roster.

> At the official tryout in July, I came back from China weaker and thinner and out of shape and with jet lag. I had really suffered on that trip and was so fatigued that I was too weak to do my own training. I got bumped off the team shortly afterwards because all the others had been training like crazy. But, when the coach asked me to make a two year commitment for 1976, he took me. (012:23)

She signed the contract and played through the Olympic year. After that, she took a year off entirely and then fell into a pattern of studying in the winter and competing in the spring and summer. She continued to compete long after all the original players and coaches from the 1976 team had gone.

> We finished third in 1983 and we had to finish second to go to the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. So, I thought we had to beat Mexico just in case! And, it paid off. When Cuba boycotted along with Russia, we became eligible. So the team called me back again. I think that was my fourth comeback - or maybe fifth. (012:81)

Although her perceptions about the sport governing association's willingness to keep older players is a direct contradiction of the recollections of one of her 1976 Olympic teammates, her own experience supports such perceptions. She was the only player carried through. Her retirements and subsequent 'call-backs' again help to describe both the cyclical nature of organized sport and her similarly patterned participation.

The following two examples raise the issue of athletes' perceptions of their sport governing associations being "out to get them". If the associations succeeded, that would indicate a termination of involvement by the athlete. First, an injured athlete recalled that her association tried to have her name removed from a designated list of potential Olympic trialists.

> We hadn't been named to the team yet so there were fifteen of us fighting for four positions. The association had tried to delete me from the list but it was, in fact, Sport Canada, that said they couldn't because I had accumulated too many points. (029:51)

Fortunately for the athlete, the association 'backed down' and she was allowed into the trial. She won the competition and went on to be one of the four athletes competing in Montreal. In the second example, a very successful athlete recalled that it was only with the assistance of the media personnel and some public pressure, that she was able to continue participating.

> The sport association was out to get me because I talked to a reporter about how much we had to pay out of our own pockets just to stay on the team ($3100). They were all set for a "burn her at the stake" event but ended up giving me an award. They didn't realize how stupid it would have been to hold a meeting in my home town, where I am well known, and crucify me. When they finally got the story straight, they were a little sheepish about it all. I enjoyed the free dinner but I certainly refused to shake the hand of the guy giving me the award. (026:82)

Again, the athlete describes herself overcoming the association's pressuring her to leave the sport.

A number of other athletes were not so successful; first, because they did not have the record of success and second, because they were unable to identify ways and means of protesting the actions of the sport governing associations. Some athletes who believe they should be placed on National Teams but are not, describe the selection processes used as "going through the motions". In other words, pre-selections for the team were made before the competition trials and only the pre-selected players showed up on the final team lists. The major criticism was one of favoritism. For example, a long time international competitor recalled

> It was all by qualifying times supposedly. There were no politics. You either made it or you didn't but no one was supposed to decide. It was by time. Winning was clear. If you won then you automatically got a berth. If you were second or third, there was a lot of politicing. So, when the coach said that he'd make sure I wouldn't make the team, I believed him. (024:40)

The extra pressure on the athlete to win the event while others only had to place second or third was unfair at best. This athlete was successful at these last trials, made the team and retired from the sport one and one-half months later.

The other major criticism about selections was the changing of criteria. This was sometimes complicated by coaches who failed to publically record the ongoing selection results and justify their selections. In this next example, a medal winning athlete from the World Championships one year, found herself demoted the following year.

> I wasn't getting along well with the coach and soon I started showing up in the second pool of athletes and I wasn't too thrilled about the demotion. It was all personality stuff. He had a couple of starlets he wanted to promote too so that didn't help me at all. (022:69)

The, after the demotion, the selection criteria were altered.

> He had this idea that since so many people were against rowing in the pair (the smallest sweep rowed boat), that he'd have two people sit in a coxed four (the next smallest sweep rowed boat) and the other two would row. It was bizarre because people started to say "If you want to row faster, row half

> slide". I didn't make the cut. After a couple of races, I saw it coming, being in the second pool and all. I ended up at the bottom of the second pool in the accumulated times list. Really, he was just going through the motions of seat-racing. It was dreadful. I figured out that the way the coach was arranging this wasn't going to work out for me because of the way he had people ordered, the favoritism he was playing, the kind of ego trip he was on. I was glad to be cut really because my ego wouldn't stand to go on the European tour as a spare. (029:94-100)

The athlete failed to make the team that year, took some time off and managed to make the National Team the following Olympic year. Not only was it remarkably tenacious of her to make the Olympic Team, for it involved considerable financial and emotional hardship, but also a credit to her belief in herself for getting re-involved in a program that she perceived had been unfair. She left the sport in 1980.

Clearly, athletes who engaged in struggles with their sport governing association frequently lost their National Team status. It seems that unless athletes were very successful (i.e.: medal winners at the World Championships), they were cut from the high performance program. Only athletes successful enough to involve Sport Canada or the public to pressure the sport governing associations in all cases survived threats of not being selected to the teams. Most often, the athletes described themselves as having little or no recourse but to accept the decisions of the sport governing associations, even when the decisions were perceived as being unfair. In this way, the controlling style of the sport governing association provoked cautious, "don't rock the boat" attitudes among the athletes. Further, the involvement of athletes in the National Team programs was not always found to be consistent but rather, was sometimes characterized by intermittant or interrupted involvement patterns. Athletes sometimes were "bumped off, then recalled", or were "called-back" year after year.

The controlling style of the sport governing associations was generally seen as greater than the influence of individual athletes unless the athletes themselves were able to mobilize support. The conclusion to be drawn about the leaving experiences of most of these athletes is that they perceived themselves as having little or no control over the timing of their leaving or forewarning that they were to be cut. They also recalled having virtually no way of protesting even the most unfair and/or unilateral of decisions. Only the most competitively successful athletes demonstrated some measure of control over the timing of their retirements.

The Boycott

The Olympic Games of 1980 were boycotted first by the United States of America and subsequently by, among others, Canada and the United Kingdom. The announcement that Canada was joining the boycott effort was a critical event in the lives of many of the 1976 Olympians who chose to continue their competitive involvements through to 1980 and beyond. More than one third of the athletes interviewed for this study made specific reference to the Boycott[52] as significant to their leaving experiences.

Some of the athletes reported how they felt when the Boycott was announced and the last hopes of competing in Moscow were destroyed. The comments of three athletes, all teammates in the same sport, have been chosen to illustrate the diversity of feeling around the event. The Boycott created "four months and no place to go" for one athlete.

> I was so prepared - I think as soon as the U.S. announced the Boycott, if Canadians were at all with it, they would know we weren't going. So, I had four months to prepare for not even going. And, I knew in 1979 that 1980 would be my last year, so I had preparation time to know I wasn't going to compete anymore. (016:75)

Another was relieved by the announcement:

> I was almost relieved when the Boycott was announced. I knew that the way things were being managed, things would not go well for us in 1980.
>
> (022:107)

The third athlete simply adjusted her Olympic goals to 1984 and tried to carry on.

> I thought about retiring in 1980 and with the Boycott, I just kept going. I wasn't ready to retire and then I thought "I'll take it one year at a time and see how I feel. When I got to 1983, I thought "Well, I'll go for 1984" but that would be my last year and I knew it. (026:91)

Two of the three athletes left high performance competition after the European tour in June and July of 1980. The third left after the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1984. Clearly, the Boycott had a certain effect on the quality of the 1980 experience for all the athletes. However, it may not have affected the *timing* of those retirements.

Although it must be understood that the post-Olympic year is generally a low key year[53], athletes from the 1980 "Boycott Team" who continued to train and compete after 1980, reported a period in which they found it difficult to focus on their sporting involvements.

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[52] This will be the term used to denote the 1980 Olympic boycott. Two other boycotts form part of the experience of several of these athletes. The 1976 boycott by some African nations resulted in a walkout of a large number of African athletes the day after the opening ceremonies in Montreal. The Russian boycott of the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1984 was joined by many communist nations and reduced the competitive fields in almost all events.

> I really felt left out a lot of times especially after 1980 when I was really in the doldrums and they (her friends) were all talking about their houses. (010:20)

Here, the wavering commitment to her sport is evident. This wavering commitment is also evident in the recollections of an unsuccessful trialist for the 1980 Olympic Team. This athlete chose to carry on for yet one more year.

> I had decided several times that this would be my last year, and every year, I did just too well. I just couldn't leave it really at the top with a good conscience. So, after the Boycott, that took a lot of wind out of my sails, so I just kept going. I decided then that 1981 would be my last year and I set goals to meet...it was difficult to decide and then actually follow through.
>
> (001)

To be noted is the similarity in the athletes' description of their emotional reactions to the Boycott. This second athlete talks of the "wind {being taken} out of {her} sails". She had decided a number of times to stop competing, yet every new competitive season found her prepared to continue. Sport requiring such a vast commitment by the athlete was, apparently, in some ways addicting and despite the firmest of intentions to leave the sport, the athlete was unable to follow through with her intention of retirement.

The inability to bring competitive preparation to fruition was another major difficulty arising from the Boycott. For one athlete, there was the bittersweet memory of watching the opening ceremonies in Moscow.

> I watched the opening ceremonies on television at my friend's home in England. Her future husband was on the screen as part of the British contingent that chose to go. We didn't even have the choice. I sat there in my X-Olympic T-shirt: "Jimmy Carter's X-Olympic Boycott Team". (016:74)

She, and her friend in England, had been Canadian team competitors in 1976. The friend was cut from the National Team program in 1978 and the athlete quoted had been named as a spare for 1980.

The Canadian Olympic Association wasn't treating our sport differently than

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[53] The four year cycle of international sport festivals is Commonwealth Games (1974, 1978, 1982, 1986, etc.), Pan American Games (1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, etc.) and Olympic Games (1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, etc). There were no international sport games scheduled for 1977, 1981 and 1985. However, international sport federations annually host World Championships in all except the Olympic years. Normally, the post-Olympic year is considered a rebuilding year and emphasis is often placed on developmental programs.

> other sports but spares are essential to our sport. So, when the coaches named the 1980 team, they didn't tell us that we had been named only as spares. After the Boycott was announced, we heard that spares would not be officially named to the Olympic Team and that really bothered me. I was almost ready to quit. It was just that politics and sport, they are hand in hand. It's too bad. It's so disappointing. But as it turned out, personally for me, being a spare in Moscow wouldn't have been fulfilling for me after 1976.
>
> (016:66-68)

The athlete last competed in a race at the Alternate Games organized for the athletes. At those competitions, it made no difference whether she was a spare or an 'official' Olympic Team member. She trained and raced in exactly the same manner as all of her teammates. She described her last experience with the sport as a 'bad taste' left in her mouth, not by the actual Boycott, but by the Canadian Olympic Association's unwillingness to be flexible and name all the deserving athletes. Another athlete recalled that since sport was her only focus for the year, the announcement of the Boycott left her with no way to achieve anything.

> 1980 was a bad year because of the Boycott. It would have been just great. It was fine to be named to the 1980 Olympic Team but we never really...all our hard work for five years, had not come to fruition because we had no avenue or no vehicle to display our expertise. My focus was wholly on sport at that time. (005:93)

A third athlete discussed being a spare in 1976 and then being named an Olympic Team member in 1980 but having no place to race. Not only was she disappointed at being unable to compete in 1980, she had now been officially named to two Olympic Teams and would have to say that she never had the opportunity to race at an Olympic Games.

> I heard about the Boycott at the end of January. Right up until the last day, I still had hopes that they'd cancel it and I'd get to go...I'm just an optimist. So, I had already managed to survive that last year or two because of the support from Mom and Dad. They gave me a living allowance. I wasn't even carded, if you can believe it.
>
> And, being on two Olympic teams in 1976 and 1980, although that's sort of a tough one because even though we made it, it was disappointing especially for me because being a spare in 1976 and then, having another opportunity and not making it. We were happy to have qualified but...it was anticlimactic to say the least. (002:100-102, 162)

These reflections obviously carry the full weight of a number of years of commitment, of hopes and dreams, and of physically arduous training. The feelings of disillusionment and disappointment are evident in many of the above comments however they are central in the following quotation:

> I still feel pretty disappointed because I know I was really ready that year. That was the year when I was training really hard and what pushed me most was thinking about winning a medal. That was the year I turned in really good

> times too. I was at a high level. I set the best times in January and again in April. So it only needed an exciting competition like the Olympics to make it burst. I knew the feeling from Montreal and at Moscow, I knew I would have felt the same surge and medalled. It was really hard to train after that. I went to classes and took some time off but I knew I was ready to go on to other things. (031:47)

The athlete was unable to race in a competition where the surge of excitement would have provided optimal conditions for her personal best results. At what she considered to be her moment of peak potential, she had no place to perform.

Another athlete echoed this same disappointment in her comments about the Canadain Olympic Association during the Boycott announcements.

> I am very disappointed and have no trust at all and I am not a believer in our C.O.A. because they went along. They are really just wimps and sucky and they went along with it. They didn't have the guts to say "We are going". God, I ached to go. I've blown it, you know. 1980 would have been my last year. (007:80-84)

Her bitterness was evident even five years after the event.

A third athlete, who had done exceptionally well in her sport, described her Boycott experiences in a unique fashion.

> The whole year was really strange. We didn't hear anything about the Games. They just went by. It never really happened, It just makes you mad afterwards when you want to hear who won what. The year before, we'd been to Moscow and looked at the facilities and seen where we would stay. It was all so strange never to have gone. After that, my training dropped drastically. I just went to play at the sport. I couldn't work hard on it anymore.
>
> (017:55-56)

Again, the elements of disappointment are evident. So, too, was the drop off in training after the Boycott. This was perhaps the clearest statement of an athlete's awareness that the cycle of sport went on without her and without many of the important sport nations in the World. Also, the athlete described her isolation from the sport world as being a combination of the events happening without Canada and the blanket of silence thrown on the results. That combination limited even her vicarious participation in the 1980 Olympic Games.

Clearly, the Boycott had a major effect on the athletic careers and leaving processes of the 1976 athletes who continued to compete in a second Olympiad. The initial reaction of the athletes to the Canadian announcement of the Boycott in early April varied from expressions of emptiness to those of relief. The Olympic Team program continued throughout the Boycott year and athletes named to the Olympic Team participated in "alternative competitions" that were held at the same time as the Olympic Games. Many of the athletes ended their high performance careers with these replacement competitions. There was no high point, no success and no surge of excitement from such competitions. Instead, the athletes recalled feelings of disappointment and strangeness. A few of the athletes continued on past 1980 but for most, 1980 spelled the end of their high performance involvement.

The importance of the athletes' goals to their perceptions of retirement experiences are unmistakable. First, there was the element of unfairness..."a sense of being promised and yet having no place to compete". A good example of this feeling is one athlete's description of the difficulties she felt in being a spare in 1976 and a full Olympic Team member in 1980 yet never having the opportunity to experience an Olympic race. Her achievements were "voided somehow" :her comments about what being an Olympian meant are filled with discriptions of not reaching or being prevented from reaching her Olympic goals.

Second, there was an element of "unfinished business". The athletes reported that the alternative competitions "in no way made up for not going to the Olympics". That is, the results of the attempts of sport governing associations and Sport Canada to provide challenging replacement competitions for the athletes were unmistakably pale in comparison to the athletes' anticipated Olympic experiences. The athletes had, in one sense, carried out their part of the agreement with organized sport; they had trained, focussed and adjusted their life outside of sport so that everything was condusive for optimal performance at the Olympic Games. The promised reward was not forthcoming as athletes were told to place the national interest above their own. No options existed. The athletes were required to simply accept the conditions under which they would receive the honor of being merely named to the Olympic Team. Unfortunately, many of the athletes had not prepared long and hard simply for the honor of being named to the Olympic Team. Many had articulated goals which included accomplishing personal best performances or medal winning races. Many of the athletes regarded the Olympic Team experiences as unfair. For example, some felt they had been "ripped off" by being prevented from competing as promised.

Third, athletes described the 'let down' which occurred afterwards, partially as a result of the lack of fruition of their dream and the unfairness of the Boycott experience. For some, it was a doldrums or an unexpected lack of ability to concentrate or focus on sport. Others recognized the strangeness of the year and commented on the sense of suspension created by knowing an important world event was occuring but receiving little or no information about it. The 'let down' was partly because of lost opportunity to achieve goals and partly because the Olympics went on just as planned without the athletes and their lost opportunity to participate went virtually unnoticed. Fourth, the Boycott experience caused a number of the athletes to pause and consider seriously new sport goals. Many had already chosen to retire in 1980 and followed through with this despite the Boycott. Others continued to prepare and compete although experiencing the "sag" in motivation after the Boycott. Those who continued generally reported a sense of disillusionment with organized sport which tainted their competitive careers from that time on.

The Boycott of 1980 was a special case in which an obstacle prevented the normal competitive patterns from occurring. The disruption prevented athletes from reaching pre-determined performance goals yet honored them with Olympic Team membership. Many athletes had selected 1980 as their final year and with no opportunity to achieve competitively, the year was a 'flat' achievement rather than a 'peak' achievement. Many unanswered questions were left in the minds of the athletes: "Could I have medalled this year?", "Would I have turned in a personal best performance?", "What would it be like to have actually-raced at the Olympics?" or "Would I have retired in 1980 if I had done well in Moscow?". The Boycott, as a special case, had an undeniably major impact on how and under what condititions some high performance athletes left sport.

The fact that the Boycott even occurred is an essential element in the nature of control that the sport organizations have over athletes. Athletes generally accepted the power of the sport organizations to enforce the Boycott although they were not as accepting of the Federal Government decisions which initiated the Boycott. Thus, just as coaches are "middle persons" in the organizational power structure, the sport organizations were perceived as "Middle-persons" in the Federal bureaucracy. Athletes, as a group, did not resist the Boycott probably because it was a political tactic imposed on the athletes through the authority structure of sport. Individually, however, the athletes expressed extreme disappointment and frustration with the experience. Most often, the frustration led to withdrawal rather than to what social psychologists would predict, aggression.

Special Athlete-Coach Conflicts

The final area of *obstacles to participation* involves an element of conflict between the athletes and the coaches. Three examples illustrate how the athletes struggled to gain or maintain control over their sport experiences. The issues raised by the examples are *restricted personal freedom, collective retirement* and *sexual abuse of athletes.*

The *restricted personal freedom* which functioned to lessen the quality of athletic experience, seemed to accelerate the speed with which athletes left sport. For example, one athlete discussed the manner in which one of her teammates left high performance sport because of a conflict over personal freedom.

> One of the athletes thought we should be able to have some sort of social life. The coach didn't and called her an agitator. I think she just found the situation intolerable. The coach wanted all the energy to go into the practices. He thought we weren't working hard enough if we went dancing. She didn't agree. That wasn't going to change so she left the team and went down to play 'pro' in the states. (012:52)

The athlete left the National team, but it cannot really be considered a retirement if she went on to play professional sport. It is, rather, like a giant step sideways into an equitable level of competition but one with fewer restrictions on personal freedom. Another athlete recalled that her restrictions were resulted from her inability to get the coach to listen to her.

> At the World's, I had problems because of the coaches. I felt I couldn't afford to taper more for the last three weeks and I think I have trouble bringing back my races if you taper me too much. One coach tapered me in spite of my objections and my years of experience. I had no rights despite all that. He felt it was his coaching job and his neck on the line so he tapered me. It was his first coaching job and he didn't want to lose it. He thought it was totally his decision. (024:43)

That race at the World Championships was the athlete's last. Both incidents resulted in almost immediate leaving ("quitting") by the athletes concerned.

In the next and final example, the athlete does not leave immediately, but the impact of the conflict on her eventual retirement is clearly stated. The problem centered around personal restricted freedom of an equestrian athlete's lack of control in making decisions about the way she worked with her mounts. In the battle of wills between the athlete and coach that developed, the athlete reported that:

> It became worse and worse. I couldn't decide what to do. It [leaving] was a terrible decision for me because she was going to be Olympic coach and I just couldn't carry on. As an athlete, you really have a sense of your own ability and she didn't leave me any! The coach can't be out there for you. She couldn't believe her ears when I told her that I was going to leave the team..said she'd pack her bags and take all her equipment away and that I'd be responsible for putting the sport back one-half a century. I mean she pulled out all the stops. Who was I to dare to challenge her [the coach]. She called the team together and told them there was a Judas in their midst. (029:32-33)

Obviously, the lengths that athletes and coaches feel compelled to go to in order to pursue what they believe to be right are extensive. In the example, the athlete willingly jeopardized the continuation of her career for better treatment of the horses. The coach threatened to leave the team and take away all her resources (horses, equipment and coaching skill). The enormous responsibility placed upon the athlete was unmistakable. From this initial confrontation, both the athlete and the coach remained with the team until the athlete suffered a very serious fall. During the athlete's recovery (six months in hospital), the coach was relieved of her duties and a new coach was hired. Fortunately, the athlete recovered in time to make the selection for the 1976 Olympic Team. Although the incident did not result in the retirement of the athlete, it does illustrate the tenuousness with which some athletes continue to compete. The athlete left competitive sport two years later as a result of many years of accumulated injuries.

The second athlete-coach conflict involves a number of athletes and one coach. The National Team was quickly organized for an eight week trip to compete at the World Championships in 1978. There were many newly-selected players, with the roster augmented by a number of the 1976 Olympians. At the conclusion of the competitions, a number of the athletes left the sport.

> We went on an eight week trip and it was like a rebellion, a tremendous revolt was going on. The coach told one player she was causing difficulties. Then he said to the press he was disappointed in their (veterans) play and that they were responsible for the crucial loss on the tour. They took that very personally and it just went downhill from there. The coach wanted to cut players who hadn't made a total commitment. One of the veteran players who should have been taking on leadership responsibilities was just like a new player...going with the wind. So he just told those players at the end of the trip that they were gone...three in particular. Then the association got upset and said he wasn't supposed to cut players without consulting them. So the coach said "Well, if they are going to question my coaching at this stage, it's not going to work out so I'd better not even bother" and he resigned. That

> was the end of us; that eight week tour. (012:62-65)

The athlete who was 'causing difficulties' told her own story.

> Although I was prepared to go through to 1980, he thought I was too outspoken and a challenge to ultimate authority. He said we needed younger players with good team sense and wanted us to go and work on our own, prepared and ready. He wanted us ready if he needed us. So, three of us in particular, were really disappointed and not all of us were really strong individuals and we were all still committed to play. One ended up having a nervous breakdown, couldn't decide even what colour scarf to wear. Another just packed it in. And me, I headed east and supported myself on some year-after athlete assistance. (015:57-60)

Evidently, the coach retired the athletes by telling them they might only be needed intermittently in the future. The coach's action was not the same as cutting team players during selections. His selection was done post-competitively and as such, was most unexpected. Also, his actions removed any decision-making about continuing on in the sport away from the athletes. The outstanding feature about the way the athletes handled the experience was that they did so alone. That is, it was handled differently by each individual without the support of now-former team members. Thus, for these athletes, the leaving experience was undertaken unwillingly and was suffered alone.

The third area of athlete-coach conflict involves an incident of sexual abuse. Although only one example is provided[34], a number of athletes reported many conflicts of a personal nature with coaches. This example was the most serious in it's effect on the athlete's retirement.

The athlete came into her sport at a very young age and was immediately quite successful. She enjoyed the special attention she received from the coach in those early years until:

> He virtually seduced me when I was very young. And I think that's what bothered me most. He was an older man, 25 or 26 and married when the first advances came and I was 13. I couldn't deal with it. I was certainly out of my depth. Now, if there had been another coach, I might have continued. But, in the end, the preferential treatment was part of the reason why I quit. That's how I dealt with it. In the interim, I didn't question it. I supposed it was natural. After I quit, I thought I could have controlled the situation in a different way and not let it happen. Now I have come to peace with it and I think I handled it okay throughout those years. I handled it the best way I could. If anything, it gives me the strength of knowing that I can handle these

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[34] No other example is contained here. Although athlete-coach conflicts involving sexual abuse did arise and were discussed by the athletes in confidence (off the record), there is insufficient data "to do justice" to their experiences. This particular example is complete and strong enough to stand alone. Just as a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing, the *Sexuality* file is not yet saturated and the researcher recognizes the need for complete research of such a sensitive concern before concepts are drawn out.

> types of things now.
>
> But I definitely feel I aged more than any other kid. When I got back after the Olympic Games, there were lots of silly little political things that happened here when we came back and it cast a bad light on me. So, for about four months, we bickered and fought and the coach was really apologetic. He didn't want to lose an athlete and I'd just had enough. By the next season, I had quit.
>
> Over the last two years, a really bad taste developed in my mouth. I wasn't old enough to reason it through but when I quit, it was to break the ties with the coach. And that was just too emotional. So I let things run their course and quit.

Several points need be considered. First, there was the sexual abuse that occurred between a coach and an athlete. The power imbalance was never more clear than this example identifies; the athlete suggests that the age difference was an important consideration in the power imbalance between herself and the man who seduced her. The athlete was too young to understand much of the experience; unable to do anything, to tell anyone, she was unable to provide any resistance nor did she talk of wanting to. Second, the preferential treatment that was initially so pleasing, was the cause of dissention between herself and other athletes. A distancing of herself from other co-competitiors resulted and increased her reliance on the coach. Third, the coach placed himself in the position of being indispensible by handling all her travel arrangements for competitions, all her finances and literally, all her opportunities to compete. She indicated that if she challenged the coach's role, it would jeopardize her athletic opportunities, particularly the Olympic opportunities. It was only as she became more socially aware and self-assured that she made a choice, the choice to leave the sport. Fourth, the athlete felt older than other kids. She grew up too quickly in one area and was out of touch with others along the way. She recalled having no close friends or confidants and very few individuals with whom she could talk. She confided in no one until more than a year after she had left the sport. Thus, the athlete felt different and was different from virtually everyone she knew and, in a very particular way, was absolutely peerless. Fifth, only after continued seductions over a number of years was the athlete able to remove herself from the coach. She left sport and the coach simultaneously. Since no one understood the true nature of the conflict, she was unable to fully explain how and under what conditions she left high performance sport. Like many other athletes, she went through the retirement experience alone. Finally, the long term cost of the whole experience for the athlete was instability in emotional and working relationships, in school and with her family. It took her several more years before she was able to talk to anyone outside her immediate family about the experience. The effects of such abuse are certainly not well addressed in relation to sport retirement.

Athlete-coach conflicts potentially influence the nature of high performance female athlete retirement. The issues of athlete freedom, collective leaving and sexual abuse are only the tip of the iceberg in this very volatile area of sport experience. Many athletes reported understanding that to belong, they had to obey. However, when conflicts arise between athletes and coaches, it is the athletes who have few resources and support in order to bring the conflict to resolution. Most of the coaching decisions with regard to athlete selection and program development appear to be unchallenged. The impression this leaves is that coaches (and the organization of sport) remain secure and the athletes "do as they are told", including leaving high performance sport on command.

There was one exception to the unchallengeable position of the coach. Poor decision-making by a coach created a dangerous situation in which the athlete was badly injured. Although the athlete was successful in achieving her Olympic goal, the price was enormously high. The burden of the physical injury and emotional stress of that year hastened her retirement. The coach was removed from the position by the sport association.

Athlete-coach conflicts are perhaps the least understood of all obstacles which function to prevent athletes from continuing in high performance sport. The coach's role with regard to sport retirement is equally poorly understood. Perhaps research into how the coach participates in athlete development and athlete retirement would prove beneficial.

C. PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL PRESSURES TO LEAVE

Pressures to leave high performance sport differ from the obstacles to participation in that they are not such absolute conditions obliging athletes to retire. Rather, they are more subtle, surmountable and individual in their effect on athletes continued involvement in sport.

There are numerous pressures to leave high performance sport, some particular to female athletes, others particular to high performance athletes, some not particular at all.

All the pressures, acting singly or in combination, do influence athlete retirement. Included for discussion here are age, employment, finances, school and family pressures.

Chronological and Sport Age

Age figures prominently in the leaving experiences of high performance female athletes. Within sport, the more accepted meaning of age as chronological years does not seem entirely appropriate for describing those experiences. Sport age, a term developed specifically from this research, is used to refer to age in the sporting context. It is a relative term that incorporates the patterns of sport involvement in specific sports. For example, novice age, peak age and retirement age have similar meanings across all sports. Chronological age does not. Where chronlogical age is useful for understanding growth and development patterns and the general lives of athletes, sport age enables the exploration of the full richness and uniqueness of the athletes as they age in sport experience.

It usually takes many years for an athlete to attain international status. In chronological years, an athlete participating in a sport may be, for example, thirteen years of age. The thirteen years of age tells us only that she is in grade 7 at school, lives at home, and has other thirteen year old friends. She is sure to be financially dependent upon her family and can expect to live at home for perhaps five to eight more years. However, in terms of sport age, that same thirteen year old athlete may be nearing peak age if she competes in either swimming or gymnastics. She probably has already competed in one or even two national championships, may have taken one international trip and is, by most standards, already a seasoned competitor. An athlete in a sport like volleyball or rowing will likely reach peak age at a chronologically later time, maybe 23 to 25, though is quite likely to have experiences that are more similar to the thirteen year old swimmer or gymnast than different. In this way, sport age is useful for adding an extra dimension to the meaning of age. As a result, it will be most useful for understanding age in relation to the sport context as athletes report their leaving experiences.

Since leaving sport is one of many transitions that athletes experience throughout their lives, it is important to understand how athletes link chronological and sport age. First, a surprising number of athletes considered themselves to be late maturers and carried that understanding into their sport lives.

> At 10 or 11, I think I was a late maturer. I still am. That's why I didn't begin my sport until ...oh, the day I won my first potatoe race, about grade three I guess. (007:25)

Another athlete shows that sport age is important:

> I'd never really been a novice at sport since I was four. (024:69)

Thus, both athletes were novice athletes at different ages, perhaps nine and four respectively. Second, many athletes experienced considerable success at young ages.

> I was reaching my peak at about fifteen. That's late for a swimmer. Nancy Garapik, at thirteen, was a world record holder...the minimum age for the Olympics has now been put at fourteen. Luckily, Nancy was able to compete at the Olympics. When I was twelve, I got my first provincial medal...at thirteen, I was better provincially and at fourteen I went to Nationals. I was slow to develop in the sport. (017:6)

The young (chronological) age overshadows the fact that both athletes had been training and competing in organized sport for some seven to nine years before reaching the national and international levels of competition. Other athletes did not experience success until much later.

> After the Olympics, I had a profoundly different personality and outlook and that was a real conflict with my parents...and that was probably late blooming adolescence and I was about twenty then. (005:57)

The athlete got involved in her first sport at age nineteen. She was a novice, yet within her first year or so of involvement with the sport she went to the Olympic Games. She was already a university student and the effect of such an immediate and successful involvement had a profound effect on the way she reacted to those around her. Again, chronological age would be useful in understanding what other nineteen and twenty year old women, even those in sport, would be doing. Sport age (the novice) introduces that extra dimension of an enormously successful beginner into the picture.

Even as youngsters, many athletes considered themselves to be different than other chronologically equal children. One athlete, for example, recalled that:

> I was a tomboy and I went without my shirt for the longest time until at one point, I think I was twelve, my mother finally grabbed me and put a bra on me...I matured late. And, I think that's why, at 30, I still love sport and I want to carry on. (007:24, 169)

Not only did she perceive herself to be different, but she made an important link between her differences early in her life and those later on in life.

Another athlete considered herself to be different from both athletes and non-athletes alike.

> I really honestly felt that I was not born in 1949 but really in 1955 or 1956. I thought there was a five year difference. I probably think I'm a hybrid. I'm a throwback to some other place, some other time. My parents have never been able to perceive having me because I don't fit in anybody's little slot. From a genetic point of view, I should never have been here. (008:70)

This athlete was one of the oldest team members in her sport in 1976 and then continued until 1980. The five year difference was a real distance between her and her teammates in 1980.

Another athlete described herself as being very mature in her sport at age 33, yet in comparison with non-sport women, she stated

> I'm at the stage where I think most women are at when they are twenty-one except I have a hell of a lot going for me. I feel like I've gone back ten years to a young woman of twenty-one, who had very high morals and high standards and had a good time, laughed a lot and enjoyed life but didn't take it too seriously. (006:88, 133)

It is possible to surmize that chronological age will not suffice for providing an accurate accounting of age. Rather, the meaning of age to the athletes, particularly in relation to sport experience (novice, peaking, etc.) is a much more appropriate consideration.

Sport age and chronological age figure prominently in the leaving experiences of high performance athletes. Age itself does not appear as an absolute criterion for leaving, but rather, a relational one. For example, one athlete described that

> Yes, starting young and finishing young, too. I finished just before I was eighteen. (024:4)

And another,

> Problem is to start old. I started (my Olympic spot) at twenty-one and that's about the time everybody finished or a lot of people finished in other sports. So, I finished at thirty-two, already pretty old, you see. I guess if I had been ten years younger, it would have been different. There weren't many people at my age competing when I finished. (004:214)

These two athletes had almost identically long competitive careers. The first athlete competed for thirteen years while the other competed for eleven. Their perception of leaving again illustrates that the sport specific context is important to the leaving experience. The first athlete, with the longer career, reported that she felt she left her sport early. The other athlete, with the slightly shorter career, points to her late beginning and her late leaving. Their relative age in comparison with others in their sport, colour their lasting impressions of their leaving.

Few athletes view chronological age as an extender rather than a limiter of continued participation at the high performance level. That is, chronlogically older others who compete may act as an incentive to younger athletes. The majority describe increasing age in terms of increasing pressure to leave the high performance level. An example of age, the extender:

> I was going to leave at twenty-four. I'd stay because a lot of people (still play). I was still one of the oldest to play and there are ten or twelve players between thirty and forty years old in Europe that still play. So I stayed.
>
> (003:134)

Even though the older players were in a different country, the incentive was strong enough to persuade the athlete to continue. Chronological age may also work to the reverse effect. An example of age, the limiter:

> I didn't only compete just for the Olympics although that was a big part of it, so I decided to keep swimming even though I knew it was my last year, because I really wanted to get on and do other things. I was twenty-one at that point, which generally speaking is very old for (an athlete in my sport) and I knew if I really wanted to, I could probably continue for another four years, but I thought in 1980, I'd done my best. (031:48)

Thus, age appears to be important to how athletes time their leaving, but it is certainly not the absolute obstacle that selections and coach-athlete conflicts represented.

The Special Case of World Master's Games

THE POST ELITE TEAM

THE OLDER WE GET......THE FASTER WE WERE!

Five of the athletes interviewed for this research attended the World Master's Games in August of 1985[55]. All called themselves retired high performance athletes and all were at the Games as competitors in world class competition. Despite this rather obvious disjuncture, the athletes continued to view themselves as retired high performance athletes who had 'come-back' to the high performance level in their Olympic sports. However, the very nature of the World Master's Games competitions demonstrated that the quality of participating was radically different than previous Olympic and world championship competitions in which the 1976 athletes had participated.

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[55] Three athletes were actually interviewed in Toronto just prior or during the Games.

> At the Mater's Games, I raced against people I raced internationally with...but I think now there is a comraderie that comes from them as new friends...but older. They are not much older than myself, maybe five or ten years, but I think everybody realizes they can do this into middle age and into old age so it's not really the same thing (as international competition).
>
> When you were on the National Team, there has to be an end to it and people watch and you watch and you know there is going to be a cut off day. I ended when I was 32, so I was really kind of old. And everybody knew I had to retire. I knew I had to retire. I could never come-back. But this Master's competition I can come-back to year after year after year. I don't have to give up all my friendships and say "well, I'll never see you again". And, I can keep changing categories...keep slotting up and up. (025:20-21)

Not only did the athlete acknowledge that she had been relatively old as a National Team member, but also, that she knew and everybody else knew she had to retire. This is an obvious acquiesence to expected retirement without mention of current or potential performance abilities. For this athlete, age was the primary reason for retiring. Yet, a scant five years later, at the Master's Games, she recalled after her race:

> The first time I was scared. I thought I'd fall in (the water). I think a person can accomplish so much in a short time. I broke four minutes which I thought was excellent. (025:27)

She managed to compete in a few races in the spring and summer of 1985 and then travelled across Canada with all her equipment and appeared in Toronto, at the Master's Games, ready to race. There, she won a bronze and a gold medal and the satisfaction of accomplishing her goals.

Two of the above athletes' teammates from the 1976 team also raced at the World Master's Games. In an interview at the Games, one of them described that her feeling of oldness was closely linked with the perception of lack of ability.

> After eight years (since the Montreal Olympics), it is easy to see that training keeps these people young. When I first started to train for this race, I felt old, very old. I think I did six minutes for that first kilometer. I timed it just to see how I was doing. I was surprised that it wasn't so far from four minutes. So I thought "Well maybe", so I registered just on time. Now, when I just raced, I put the boat on the rack and I thought "Ah, that's not too bad for an old person". The oldness, it goes away.
>
> If you used to compete, you want to win, and that, you have to put in your mind that it might just be for participation. That's the difference, yes. It is too easy to think that "I am too old to race and not too good". I have only fifty kilometers of training and some of these people have been training for more than a year now for just this race. I can't compete with so many kilometers of training. When we get to 750 meters, I just don't have it anymore. There is no more power. That is when they pull away from me. If I can put more time in, in four years at Amsterdam, I will be very good. I used to be good, you remember? (004:2-12)

Clearly the meaning of oldness to this athlete has been internalized for a long time. When she retired from her Olympic sport (1977), she already considered herself to have been a late starter and a late finisher. She always thought that she was old for her sport. However, the Master's Games competitions provided a certain rejuvenation in terms of her sense of sport age, i.e.: maybe there was still some ability left that, with training, could be tapped. The growing awareness of ability banished the much of the oldness!

This apparent connection between ability and oldness is quite understandable when consideration is given to the stereotype of old people as dependent people (Matthews, 1979). Although the athlete described her ability in relative terms, i.e.: "it's not too bad for an old person", on race day, all her co-competitors were of the same age. What separated them at the finish line was preparation, training and sport skill. It was not age. It was, as the first athlete described, the most even of all competitions.

Both the quotes illustrate that the meaning of oldness in sport was integral to athletes' sense of identity. When the Master's Games athletes orginally left high performance sport, they had considered themselves to be very old in terms of sport age. Yet their participation at the World Master's Games sufficiently challenged their mis-perceptions and actually seemed to place the athletes "back on track" as competitors. What the World Master's Games represented was a new cycle in the organization of sport whereby "even old, retired, has-been" athletes could make a "come-back". Thus, the negative perception of oldness in athletes was effectively diluted by good quality, high level, age class competition.

In conclusion, age proved important to how athletes experienced both sport competition and retirement. First, chronological age was found to be insufficient for understanding the meaning of age within the context of sport. Therefore, the concept of sport age was developed from the athlete interviews to better incorporate the importance of sport specific experience such as sport beginnings (novice), sport achievements (peaks), sport leavings and oldness. Sport age enabled the researcher to make broader cross-sport and cross-age comparisons that enhanced tremendously the descriptions of athletes ageing and leaving sport.

Second, athletes considered age an important landmark as they experienced high performance sport. Their chronological age appeared as a constant yardstick for comparisons with other same-aged individuals, both within and outside of sport. Sport age was similarly useful as a determinant of athlete's progress in their high performance sport and in intersport comparisons. Central in these comparisons was the presence or absence of like-aged individuals still involved in high performance sport.

Third, athlete's perceptions about personal maturation rates seem to have coloured their perception of their age in relation to leaving high performance sport. In this way, the self-defined late maturers reported beginning sport later and staying later than other athletes. Early entry into sport might also be indicative of early leaving. Although inconclusive, the relative personal attitude towards age and development may prove a fruitful area for investigation into perceived longevity in high performance sport.

Fourth, many athletes reported being substantially different than chronologically-aged peers and somewhat different than sport-aged peers. Some felt as much as a decade younger than their chronological age. Such discrepancies were somehow correlated with competitive longevity. Although it is unclear how the 'peerlessness' affects the nature and timing of sport retirement, 'peerlessness' may forecast the potential problems some athletes experience.

Fifth, the importance of chronologically older athletes can not be underestimated for affecting the leaving of younger athletes. Athletes who discussed being oldest also reported pressure to leave competitive sport because of their age. The ability to identify still older competitive athletes seemed to be an incentive to remain in competitive sport.

Sixth, the occurrance of the World Master's Games shed new light on the meaning of sport retirement. 1976 athletes who retired between 1977 and 1981 prepared for and competed in international age-class sport in 1985. The participating athletes reported experiencing new opportunities for training, competition and goal setting when the World Master's Games were announced. For some, the re-involvement was viewed as a temporary "come-back". Others regarded their participation as indicative of their new long-term involvement in post high performance international competition. Some reported banishing sport 'oldness' by becoming competitively able. The opportunity to compete internationnally appeared to be just the incentive needed for athletes to 'get back in the groove' of training and competing. Again, impermanence and potential variations of sport retirement are indicated.

Finally, athletes' advanced age was frequently viewed as indicating a decreased competitive ability. As such, it was regarded as one criterion for leaving high performance sport. Even in situations where athletes considered themselves to have several competitive years remaining, sport governing associations 'retired' athletes because of advanced sport age. One athlete considered such retirements to be 'leaps of logic' since sport age was mistakenly considered to be an absolute rather than a relative criterion for performance potential. Despite the exceptions where older athletes did successfully continue in international competition, considerable weight was given to the presumed correctness of the relation between advanced sport age and decreasing ability. Athletes at a peak plateu of performance are given little opportunity to remain there for a long period of time. Clearly, this suggests the belief that once optimal sport age is reached, the performance potential necessarily decreases and retirement should immediately follow.

Throughout the discussion on age, there was an absence of discussion about athletes' declining physical abilities. Only in the reports of the World Master's Games was mention made of post-competitive or post-peak ability levels. It may be surmised from this lack of discussion that declines in performance ability did not occur or that athletes were reluctant to discuss them. Athletes' reluctance to discuss them is more likely and may be one of the conditions of leaving high performance competition.

There exists an ageism in high performance sport whereby discrimination against older athletes is justified on the weak assumption of their declining physical ability and the duty to provide opportunity for younger 'up and coming' athletes. Sport governing associations and athletes alike generally accept that age is a criterion of retirement. Thus, athletes may retire because of either chronological or sport age independent of the actual abilities they may possess.

Life On Hold

One particularly vivid aspect of being a high performance female athlete is what some athletes described as a sense that the rest of their life were on hold, in effect, suspended while they completed their athletic careers. As athletes approached the end of their high performance competitive pursuits, some decribed a mounting pressure to 'get on with life'. For some, these pressures were considered the major reason for the initiation of their retirement.

When athletes spoke of the final year of competition, they frequently identified pressing or persistant factors which 'turned their head' from competitive sport. Simple itemizing the factors would serve to minimize their full impact on athlete retirement. Therefore, attention is paid to when the factors were first noticed and identified by the athletes and how the factors together impacted on sport retirement.

Few athletes were affected by any one isolated factor. More athletes were affected by a number of factors such as work, school, social isolation, family and children and possible come-backs to sport at a later date were also discussed. As athletes continued to participate in competitions of an international calibre, their increased awareness of these pressures or competing interests appeared to contribute to the initiation of their sport retirement.

One athlete, a competitor at the national and/or international level from 1970 to 1976, discussed the relationship of being successful (in this case, winning) to placing the other activities in her life on hold.

> Athletes start to live after they leave competitive sport. That's what I can see. When I was young, there was so much pressure on the winning part of it and not on the enjoyment. We are losing the essence of sport that way. We replaced enjoyment with medals. I won medals and they kept me going. Everyone else fell away. The second place finishers were not good enough to continue. When I was winning I felt like a somebody. You're thought of as being happy and having status. I was lucky to have my job when I finished sport. But really, I struggled to find time in the last few years to be with my family and friends. I was their stranger for a long time. My work was 9:00 to 4:30 which was lucky. I could train before work and, since I did the night courses for those years too, I studied often for my lunch hours and typed my papers in between my real typing work they paid for. Many times too, when it was pressing, I would take long breaks in the bathroom at work and read a chapter in the textbook for the exams. It was hard to always take my vacation and my overtime by going to competitions. I always came back to work more tired than when I left. My other workers, they laughed and always said "What for?". While I was winning the medals, I knew why I was doing it all. But, after the Olympic Games, the big goal was gone. I needed to spend more time with my family so they could know me again. Also, I had neglected my house and my friends and even to read a book for pleasure for so long. But I did learn to become again, like everybody else, just not different anymore. (004:190-202)

The athlete explored the pressures she experienced in trying to be a high performance athlete, work full time and study half time at night. Although her paid work financially sustained her through the competitive years, her few holidays were spent in team travel and competitions. She went to school continually through those competitive years and in ten years of night school earned a college diploma, an undergraduate degree in Business Administration and began study on a Master's Degree in Business Administration. Later in the interview, she described that she felt her family responsibilities acutely. As the fourth oldest in a family of eleven siblings, the cumulative weight of missing the Christmas, birthday and anniversary celebrations that were so important weighed heavily upon her.

Underlying the whole discussion was this athletes' sense of being unique or different from others at work, at home and even among the other athletes. When she was high profile, the uniqueness was regarded as a reasonable price to pay. Although many athletes describe being able to handle conflict or ambivalence (dissonance) for considerable periods of time, some athletes report resolving the discomforts more rapidly. For example, she was pleased to be introduced as "Ma soeur Olympique!" by her brothers. She reported that her friends and her family had been proud of her accomplishments for quite a long time. At work, her co-workers did not understand why she did so much. Further, none of the other athletes on her team worked full time all year around. Two were teachers and could take the summers and the Easter break. Other were full time students and/or worked part time. When the successes as an athlete became unbalanced with the amount of uniqueness she experienced, the athlete sought to rejoin her family and her friends. Her discomfort with differentness was no longer the price she wanted to pay.

Another athlete remembered that the limited time, energy and her advancing age pressured her away from competitive sport. She was married and had one child plus a full time position as a paid worker. In order to continue in competitive sport, she would have had to eliminate a number of responsibilities from her daily life.

> I don't have time to train for the Olympics. I just don't have the time or energy. I trained, sort of, but not really and that's what made me realize that I can't train full time if I am going to work. ...Everything is pressuring me away from being an athlete. The older I get, the harder it is to be an athlete. If I continue to compete, I'll have to eliminate a lot of things from my life. (007: 14, 62)

In some ways, this athlete did not consider herself to be retired. From the quote, a turning point in her athletic career is near. The athlete had been in transition for some time (since the birth of her child) and was poised to make a decision regarding her future athletic career. Although the will to continue training was apparent, the enormous commitment of continuing to be a high performance athlete weighed heavily. Being married, having a child and working full time were not compatible with the criteria necessary for this athlete to continue.

In comparison, an athlete in a different sport managed to establish a balance between competitive sport and a family life. She worked full time and was married throughout the years of high performance competition (1974 - 1980).

> I retired after 1980. For one thing, I had to put energy into my marriage. Also, I was 30 and so we wanted to have a family fairly soon. It was a goal, 1980, I had to get it out of my system. (016:80)

The athlete reported that other interests were becoming paramount to her desires to continue as an athlete. She managed to put all her efforts into the one final attempt to make the 1980 Olympic Team, was selected only as a spare, and made the European Tour that summer. She retired "July 19, 1980". At the time of the interview, she was nursing the second of two children and was taking 'a year out' of competitive play. Evidently, the pressures to return home and spend more time on the marriage did not develop suddenly, nor did the athlete suddenly quit competitive sport. Instead, there is an interplay between the athlete's goals as a competitor and as a wife and prospective mother. She chose to delay motherhood until after the 1980 Olympic Games.

The final quote is from an athlete who struggled with the divisions between the sport world and the non-sport world. She chose to leave sport at the conclusion of her academic degree which, coincidently, was also the 1980 Olympic year.

> When I was applying for jobs, they loved and really appreciated a background in sports. Of course, they expected all male applicants. It's almost a pre-requisite for getting a job and once you're there, it's like "Okay, now this is your business career". I could not ask for extended leaves of absence from my work. I also saw that there were European women who were much older, still doing what I did in sport. Age was not really a barrier. So I thought, sport is too much right now if I want to work and if I leave it, it doesn't preclude coming back. (005:74)

Again, there is a combination of factors which collectively amount to at least a temporary leave of absence from high performance sport. In this case, the athlete returned to the sport in a coaching capacity during her first two years of full time work but did not return as an athlete.

Athletes were able to describe the pressures or competing interests which interacted with their decisions about leaving high performance sport. The most frequent factors were those which took time and energy away from the intense preparations necessary for international competive sport. Being married, having children, re-establishing important family ties and having full time career work all served to complicate or interrupt the focus of necessary concentration. The athletes all described coming to decisions about leaving over a period of time. That is, none left abruptly upon finding their 'plate of responsibilities' overflowing. Instead, they described making choices about what they considered to be most appropriate for them at their age and in their situation.

A sence of finality pervades the athletes' comments. Many felt they had reached a goal but were unable to reach another yet higher goal. This leaves an unclear relationship between reaching one's potential as an athlete and leaving sport because the rest of life is on hold. It is an interesting but inconclusive relationship at this time.

D. APPROPRIATE TIMING

Although the reasons for leaving high performance sport are closely bound with the timing of the leaving, both are treated separately because generally, the athletes treat them as such. In the trajectory of athletes' competitive careers, the athletes reported that there was an appropriate or correct time to leave competitive sport. Although the rule was unwritten, it was understood that leaving too early or hanging on too long were to be avoided. Leaving at the peak performance level, at the height of the athletic career, was considered most appropriate. The different timing patterns are examined in this final section in four brief areas: 'forewarning', 'leaving before the peak', 'leaving at the peak' and 'leaving after the peak'.

Forewarning

Some athletes described forewarnings that leaving high performance sport was impending. As one athlete described, it was the pressure from behind that informed her.

> I felt I might get kicked off...if I didn't get better fast. She was just young and had started to make great strides then. So that was sort of the beginning of the writing on the wall for me... she was fast catching up to my spot.
>
> (014:81)

Another knew that her age was the critical factor.

> They all just quit after the Olympics because there was nothing for them. You know, you get to be about 16 or '17 in this sport and you begin to see the writing on the wall. I don't think I would ever have stayed in at that age unless I was still being successful. (017:43)

The third athlete, who anticipated leaving, understood herself quite well.

> I really left when I wasn't selected in 1979 but that wasn't my official

> retirement. That was more of a mental retirement, that I wasn't going to be an elite athlete anymore and I realized that my days were going to be numbered and I wasn't going to have fun anymore so I wasn't going to be a good athlete anymore. I figured I could make one more shot at it , trying to be number one. That's what I told everyone but I really didn't feel it strongly inside. (022:108)

From these three athletes, it can be understood that some athletes considered the timing of their retirement to be important. Further, the athletes reported that when the 'writing was on the wall', the correct way to leave had to be planned. It was best to retire as a success rather than as "a has-been". The athletes showed little interest in staying involved past their peak.

Leaving Before The Peak

Several athletes reported that they did leave too early or had been afraid that they would leave too early. The timing of their leaving affected their overall feelings about their general athletic careers.

One athlete recalled that she had publically announced her goal to go to the Olympic Games. Then, despite her long term injury and the unhappiness of her final two years of competition she felt unable to renegotiate her earlier goal. Thus, she continued to train and compete because people expected it of her. She didn't want people saying that she'd "quit"! Another athlete reported that she wanted to retire from the sport rather than play at a level lower than the level to which she had become accustomed.

> After 1976, I am going to leave. I'm going to retire. I don't want to play club ball after I've played internationally. It's really quite a step down to go from international ball to club ball. (012:47)

That is, the athlete saw room in sport only for advancing her skills. She considered play at the lower level to be undesirable.

A third athlete misjudged the timing of her retirement and left too early.

> My time from 1980 would have medalled in 1984. It makes me kind of sick because I knew I could get faster. You almost cry because you misjudged and you weren't there at the right time. I was happy for the competitiors but it was hard to watch. (013:49)

The 1980 Boycott prevented the athlete from racing for an Olympic medal. Yet in 1984, when she was a spectator when her favorite event was raced, the times she had earlier performed won Olympic medals. In 1980, the athlete calculated that times for her event would get substantially faster over the four intervening years. She also felt that she could improve only a second or two and thus, would definitely not medal in 1984. Because of the Soviet Boycott[56] in 1984, the time in her best event was much slower than she had imagined. As a result, she considered that she had managed the timing of her retirement poorly.

Finally, there was one athlete, not yet retired, who considered the timing of leaving.

> I'm going to be really mad if I have to retire for some reason, because I've never reached my peak. (007:101)

The athlete was having definite trouble making a "come-back" at the high performance level but was unwilling to give up the goal of leaving only after she had reached her performance peak.

These athletes showed that they carefully tried to organize their sport retirement to coincide with their peak opportunities or their peak goals. Their inability to arrange the timing of leaving to fit the desired path appeared to create difficulties for at least some athletes. Also, athletes' reluctance to retire early seems to be associated with reasons such as keeping promises, avoiding lower levels of competition and managing the timing correctly in their planning.

Leaving at the Peak

Athletes considered going 'out on top' to be the typical and appropriate way to leave high performance competition. Although good health and the average sport leaving age were necessary conditions of going 'out on top', the achievement of athletic potential was the most critical concern.

Only one athlete discussed reaching her potential performance level as she retired. Afterwards, there was no reason for her to remain.

> . I finally learned how to do it. It was like everything fell into place and I knew I was getting stronger as I competed in that race. It was like at last I could finally do it. It's like setting a world record and quitting. I learned and then I quit. (031:92)

Another athlete, one who competed for nineteen years in her sport, was never able to reach her potential.

> There were so many competitions...there was always that repetition but we never really got anywhere and after awhile, I wondered if we ever could. Our

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[56] In 1984, the U.S.S.R. announced they would boycott the Los Angeles summer Olympic Games. Soon afterwards, a number of other eastern block countries announced that they would join the boycott.

> training was never cohesive or organized. It was done individually and there was no plan to work or develop. I just reached a point where I got no better. (021:69)

Both athletes chose when to retire, the first supremely satisfied and the second unsatisfied with the experience of competing at the high performance level.

Other athletes recalled that it was necessary to get out "once all the potential was used up", "when you've done it all", or "when you have made the perfect landing". From these expressions, some of the diversity of what it means to go 'out on top' are revealed. 'On top' was not always considered as the medal or the best race, but simply the right time as determined by the goals of the athletes.

Even though athletes wanted the timing of their leaving to be correct, few anticipated that actually getting 'to the top' would be less than the absolute culmination of their sport experiences. That is, when some athletes did reach 'the top', the experience was somehow less than they had expected it to be. For example, at the end of the best race of her life, one athlete recalled

> I raced so hard that I almost blacked out. I felt really awful and it scared me to feel like that. I had difficulties breathing and things were moving all around me. I had to sit down to try and get my bearings...I never reached that deep again. (024:42)

She did not leave competition after that race but she commented that she felt she went out on the down side of her career.

Three athletes recounted how they felt when they received either World Championship or Olympic medals. None felt that actually getting the medal was the peak of their career. The first, an Olympic medal winner, recalled

> After I won my medal, I remember waiting for this wonderful greatness to come. It didn't come when I finished the race so I thought it would come when the crowds cheered. But it didn't come then either. So I thought I would feel it when I got up on the podium to get the medal...but I didn't feel it then either. It was an emptiness. All those miles for this, the greatness was fleeting. When I won that medal, I knew that only the athlete was there. I'd left lots of me behind. (024:76)

The same theme, emptiness at 'the top', was repeated by another World Championship medallist.

> I got the Bronze medal in Amsterdam and I felt a little bit empty because when you get a certain goal and there is nothing left to train for, you feel sort of empty. After that, we weren't together as a team anymore. It was the end of the year and everybody went in different directions. Every time you pull apart, you are no longer a team. (025:9)

Again, the emptiness and this time, disappointment, was reflected in the response of a third medallist.

> The medal was somehow disappointing. Other people sometimes build it up to be something bigger, greater. But it's all experience. Some athletes cried inconsolably if they didn't medal. But I knew I was racing well at that point. It wasn't and still isn't a big deal. I'm proud of the achievement but it's worth nothing out of the ordinary for me. I worked hard for it. Now, if I'd come out that year for the first time and won a medal unexpectedly, that would have been amazing. (028:18)

Medalling figured frequently among the athletes' goals in sport. If the experience of being 'on top' was as anticlimatic as many of these athletes described, perhaps getting 'to the top' was unrealistic as a final reason for most athletes. Reaching one's performance potential, that is, racing the best possible race, appeared to be much more satisfying as a final reason for getting 'out on top'[57].

Leaving After the Peak

Athletes unanimously rejected wanting to stay in competitive sport for as long as possible. Rather, they reported that the only reasons they would remain in sport irrespective of their peak performance potential was if they were in good health, highly successful and/or had some degree of control over their experience. As one very successful athlete recalled,

> I said if I won or if I did well in the Olympics, I'd retire. But because I'd won so many other titles, I didn't really feel I had to win more. After that, I took it one year at a time, but kept going. I haven't won big since 1981 but I'm still in it. (006:118)

The sport was less physically demanding than most Olympic sports and the athlete found herself comfortable competing internationally without the former successes. Her response was unique amongst the high performance athletes. Although other athletes found the athletic environment mentally and socially stimulating and talked of a reluctance to leave, they none-the-less did retire.

Most, however, simply did not want to participate at the high performance level past peak performance achievements. One athlete reported that there was a definite time for leaving.

> In sport at that level, you're good or you're not good. You keep going or you

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[57] One might ask if the pursuit of an Olympic medal is worth it. There is an old adage about travelling the route is more exciting than arriving at one's destination. There is great diversity among the ways athletes perceive receiving medals and striving for them. This points to the importance of *goals* as mediators in athlete retirement.

> leave. As long as you are with the system, you are good and you keep going and it's allright. If you are not good, you leave. That's the way it is. It's goodbye. Salut! Who cares? I should have taken competition more easily. I was too serious and so I missed some of the fun and enjoyment of it. When I left, it wasn't very traumatic. It was time. (004:264)

For this athlete, everything progressed exactly as expected: once she was no longer good, she left the sport.

In contrast, an athlete in the same sport recalled that she left sport as soon as she was successful so that the system would not 'suit' her.

> I had been scratching (racing) in skiing for the National Ski Team but I didn't ski well when I was sixteen so "Boom!", that was it. I was over the hill. I never really reached my potential in skiing. Later, in my Olympic sport, I got out on top of it so I remembered success. I didn't stay in long enough to be cut. I knew whether it would be age or size or that I'd run out of steam, that I'd be cut. So I have really good feelings about my athletics. I saw other people just keep going because they had nothing else going on in their life and they ended up quitting over some bad feelings or personality conflicts. (009:64)

This athlete had learned from her previous sport experience that she did not want someone else to tell her that she was cut. As soon as she reached her potential, she left. Others did not and suffered because of it. This athlete clearly understood that leaving too late was something to be avoided.

Another very successful athlete echoed the above statement. She was unwilling to stay longer than she was successful; for this athlete, that meant nine years of international competition.

> Some hang on and you see people who have won medals and they are back barely making the team and not placing in even the semi-finals. I didn't want to be like that. I was just finished. Enough is enough. I didn't want to get to the point where I was not successful. I didn't want to compete at a level where I was doing it half-heartedly or where I was not performing as well as I had been. I wanted to go out with a bang and not sort of hang in there, just making the team. (026:92-94)

Again, the avoidance of remaining in competition past one's peak is clearly stated. Also, the negative regard for athletes who stayed on too long was present.

Sport socialization appears to include concepts related to the right and proper timing for leaving high performance sport. Athletes reported that different reasons are associated with the timing of retirement but most accepted that there is a best time to leave. Early retirement and late retirement both occur but athletes indicated that if they have more control over when they retired or had been able to make better decisions, they would have prefered to leave at the peak of their athletic prowess.

E. CHARACTERISTICS OF LEAVING

From the examination of the barriers to continued participation, much is revealed about the characteristics of leaving. Some of the characteristics prove to be typical of or similar to the characteristics of leaving described in the two preceeding chapters. However, others are distinctive and valuable for expanding the understanding of the diversity of athletes' experiences with leaving. The more typical characteristics will be discussed first, followed by those which are more distinctive.

Typical Characteristics

First, and in common with leaving as a result of injury and/or illness, leaving can be precipitated prematurely by some obstacles and pressures which confront athletes. In instances where athletes are presented with limited opportunities to compete, eg. the Olympic Boycott or a change in events, the incidence of retirement increases. Frequently, the direct impact of the barriers was immediately recognized and athletes acted accordingly.

Further, the possible delay in goal achievement meant that almost all athletes paused to reconsider their future sport goals. The Boycott of 1980 is perhaps the most vivid example of the manner in which goals set well in advance became unachievable through no fault of the affected athletes. Those who had planned to leave after the 1980 Olympic Games chose to retire as planned or tried to continue, one year at a time, until the next Olympic Games. Those who had made no decisions about leaving paused to consider where their athletic careers were heading. Some of the athletes chose to continue. Others chose to leave. The difficulties these athletes faced during the 1980 Olympic year and afterwards included a sense of loss, disappointment, mistrust, unfinished business and a lack of fruition for all the arduous training. Many were devasted. A few were relieved. However, all were affected by the lack of opportunity to achieve their goals as planned.

In many cases, the athletes reported that they left sport after being confronted by barriers which had little bearing on their performance skill and ability. Events such as the Boycott, pre-season and post-season selections, athlete-coach conflicts and the disbanding of national team programs effectively removed all opportunity for athletes to continue competing in a particular season. Either interrupted career paths or retirement resulted. Many of the athletes experiencing such barriers reported difficulty with attempts to 'come-back' as competitors and eventually settled on retirement.

Second, and again similar to the characteristics of leaving revealed through the examination of injury and/or illness, the element of control was only minimally evident in many retirement circumstances. Athletes discussed having some control over their retirement in terms of when it might take place; whether or not retirement would happen was not at question. The cumulative effect of a number of obstacles and/or pressures further reduced the choices about the timing of retirement.

Third, individual differences were evident among athletes faced with obstacles and pressures to continued participation at the high performance level. What led one athlete to leave sport might strengthen another's determination to go on. Athletes' readiness to leave sport and their goals were the most prominent features in the discussions about the effect of barriers on retirement.

Fourth, the coaches' expectancies of athletes must not be underestimated. Athletes frequently described coaches as more powerful than athletes. Some even thought of coaches as power-brokers who sought to produce the best possible performances from obedient athletes. Coaches were sometimes viewed with suspicion if they unfairly 'cut' athletes through means such as pre-selecting athletes, altering selection criteria, or only going through the motions of selection. Athletes described conflicts with the coaches over training methods and selection procedures but coaches, by virtue of their positions, held the ultimate responsibility. That is, coaches were positioned to make decisions about whether or not athletes should continue in high performance sport and occasionally made such decisions for rather suspect reasons. The athletes described having little or no way of protesting even what appeared as the most unfair of decisions. As one athlete recalled, the manner of team selections was so short-sighted and unfair as to be 'leaps of logic' in the minds of the affected athletes.

For some athletes, failure to meet their own expectations as athletes was an initiator of retirement. Athletes who wanted to but were unable to make the fullest commitment to competitive sport preparation considered either retirement or reduced sport activity as viable options. Athletes who had expected sport to be a good experience and then found themselves disillusioned by such events as the Boycott or politics within the sport governing associations also found retirement to be increasingly attractive. In the same light, some athletes recognized themselves as expendible to the ongoing cycle of organized sport and considered retirement from the high performance level.

For some athletes, failure to meet expectations as individuals living in a social world also were initiators of retirement. For example, athletes with considerable career momentum who were confronted by almost insurmountable barriers to continued participation, reported major upheavals in their lives. Some chose to leave sport. Others had no alternative but to leave high performance sport. A few others struggled to continue and developed new plans and goals. However, athletes who had some readiness to leave competitive sport reported being more prepared for obstacles and pressures which presented themselves. The readiness to leave was the result of such factors as early decision-making about the timing of leaving, past sport injuries, past selection records, sport age, chronological age and the cyclical nature of sport. Understanding the inevitability of retirement from sport and thus, being ready to leave could be considered forms of pre-preparation for the eventuality of leaving high performance sport.

Characteristics of Leaving

Some of the characteristics of leaving revealed through the examination of barriers to continued participation are substantively different from those discussed in the two previous chapters.

There is some discussion of what might be called mandatory retirement; a form of compulsory leaving based. The first mandatory retirement form is called "the cycle must go on". Despite athletes' individual hopes, dreams, skills and abilities, they are sometimes retired from the system: organized sport repetitively continues in four year cycles and athlete 'turn over' is an essential part of that system. The system teaches the athletes that they are temporary members of the international competitive sport system and are only welcome to occupy a position for as long as they can defend that position. Occasionally, the sport system may change their program emphasis and decide to invest time and energy into potentially successful athletes rather than the currently successful ones. In such instances, the better athletes are pushed out of their positions by poorer athletes with as yet unproven competitive records. That is, the system ensures its own continuation, sometimes at the expense of the athletes who participate in it.

Another characteristic of leaving related to mandatory retirement is age. Both the sport system and participating athletes operate with the belief that there is a ceiling age; that is, a chronological age beyond which the athletes are not expected to be competitive. Beyond that age, the abilities of the athletes will decline. Coaches and athletes frequently used the criterion of age as the rationale for retirement decisions. Coaches 'cleaned house' or 'cut' athletes on the basis of age. Athletes used age to monitor their progress in the sport and the approximate time remaining until their retirement.

Sport age was also an indicator of retirement. Sport age, as a variation on chronological age, was a way in which athletes talked of their performance progression in sport. Within sport, it was a way of identifying the athlete's status and level in that sport. Words such as novice, national, high performance and retired athlete were also expressive of the degree of success of an athlete relative to other athletes. Athletes within a given sport could estimate, on the basis of their sport age, when they might leave sport.

This introduces the timing of retirement. Athletes reported that there was a best time to retire and then early and later times to leave high performance sport. Generally, the best time to leave was the moment when athletes had their optimally best performance or when they had reached their competitive goals. Athletes were unanimous in their wish to avoid leaving too early (before reaching their potential) and were almost unanimous in their rejection of 'hanging on too long'. Both the timing of leaving and sport age can be considered as unwritten informal rules of high performance sport to which athletes generally adhere.

A third form of leaving was indicative of the lack of concern often shown by sport organizations to competitive athletes' skills and abilities. In this study, athletes talked of their experiences with what one athlete named as "forced retirement". Coaches and/or sport governing associations determined that for 'just cause' athletes would no longer be allowed to continue to compete at the high performance level. Athletes who were agitators, who didn't fit the mold or who belonged to teams that would no longer be supported found themselves unable to participate. Athletes provided examples to the researcher where forced retirement occurred both pre-season and post-season. Athletes talked of having little control over forced retirement and generally considered such retirements as unfair. Characteristically, forced retirement was initiated by coaches or sport governing association personnel applying pressure on athletes to leave. The pressure took forms: verbal criticism, public criticism, reductions in available information or financial support and pre-selection procedures. Athletes, naive to such possibilities, found the experiences difficult to reconcile and experienced adjustment problems afterward.

Forced retirement was frequently initiated because of major conflicts between athletes and coaches or the sport governing associations. Athletes almost universally regarded themselves as the powerless individuals within those conflict situations. Athletes reported that they could only wrest control from the powerful if they were high profile successful athletes and could bring Sport Canada to their defence or if they were in their final competitive year and thus able to risk more. The athletes seldom described actually being able to solve the conflicts. More often than not, the athletes left sport because of the conflicts.

Regardless of the manner in which sport retirement was initiated, most athletes described experiencing their retirement in isolated circumstances[31]. Athletes reported being alone after leaving; most going their own way. The athletes participated in sport in a variety of ways after leaving the high performance level and some even returned to international competition through come-backs, call-backs or participation in the World Master's Games. Thus, retirement was seldom absolute retirement from sport. Most often, athletes left the high performance level but remained active in sport.

Many of the athletes reported that they felt old and of lesser ability after they retired from competitive sport. In an illuminating interview with several of the World Master's Games athletes, it was revealed that age and the sense of declining ability could be banished by "getting back in the groove" by preparing for future competition. The older athletes pointed to their usefulness as role models to encourage younger athletes to stay in competitive sport longer thereby extending the assumed age limits of sport.

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[31] Isolated is not to be confused with lonely. Rather, isolated is closer in meaning to 'alone'.

Questions of Absence

Questions must be raised about conditions or characteristics of leaving high performance sport which did not appear in this study. First, there was a virtual absence of discussion by athletes of their own declining sport skills and abilities. They talked at length about the circumstances surrounding their leaving but only rarely did they discuss their personal physical condition or limitations. One athlete related her expectancies about being caught from behind but said little of whether she had reached or was past her potential performance level. Another reported that she 'lost the fire' and could not 'rekindle the flame'...but said she had not reached her peak ability and was conscious that she might be prevented from doing so. She did not add that she might be unable to do so. No athlete listed declining ability as the primary reason for leaving. Do athletes consider declining abilities? If so, how? And if not, then why not?

Second, there is a lack of any formal retirement rituals or ceremonies which marked either the decision to retire or the act of leaving. Yet, some athletes talked of an official retirement. What is an official retirement? Who participates? How is it marked or celebrated? Who has an official retirement? Why not others? If retirement is not official, what other kinds are there?

Third, attitudes of coaches and co-competitors seem to play more important roles than do family and friends in the discussion of athlete's retirement. Although decisions about being married and having children figure in some of the discussions, few athletes reported discussions with parents, spouses, family or friends about when and how to retire. Also, after leaving, most athletes talked of post-leaving time as isolated time. The role of significant others in decisions about retirement needs much closer examination.

Fourth, where and when did athletes learn about what retirement meant? Athletes spent little time in discussion about the ineventuality and meaning of retirement. Also, different degrees of permanence in leaving patterns occurred after retirement. Yet athletes learned that if they had a choice there was a best time to retire. If they had no choice, they still were expected to accept retirement as being part of the essential course of events within the sport experience. How did athletes make sense of the retirement of those leaving before them? After them? How did the meaning of retirement change from the time they were novice athletes until they became permanently retired atheltes? What is the spectrum of retirement statuses that an athlete could occupy?

Fifth and finally, athletes reported little discussion of their futures after sport. Understandably, some discussed the meaning of leaving the highly committed life of high performance sport. However, few seemed able to recall making plans for a future after competitive sport. In fact, athletes who had the most difficulty with adjusting to leaving reported long periods of time where they were aimless, lacking in directioned and undisciplined. Clearly, one of the characteristics of sport retirement is the absence of discussion about a life after high performance sport.

F. CONCLUSIONS

Many different barriers influenced how and under what conditions athletes left sport. Faced with obstacles over which they perceived having little or no control, athletes experienced diversions in their intended athletic paths. For some, these diversions were merely interruptions or less than direct routes for goal achievement in sport. For others, the diversions led to retirement from high performance competition.

The first section of this chapter discussed obstacles to continued participation. Changes to rules or to the expected cycle of sport caught some athletes unawares and left them feeling powerless to protest. When the opportunities to compete were severely limited, only the most successful athletes were able to mobilize resistance and challenge the system. It was also discovered that intermittent carreer patterns were much more common than anticipated. Athletes discussed "call-backs", "come-backs", "time-outs", "cuts", formal retirement and informal retirement. Most considered retirement to be a somewhat permanent reduction in training and preparation specifically aimed at international competition.

The Olympic Boycott of 1980 was a special circumstance which affected many of the 1976 athletes who continued through 1980. Some of these athletes reported a certain readiness to leave and even though they were disappointed or even devastated by the Olympic Boycott, their plans for retirement did not change. Further still, with the announcement of the Boycott, many athletes recognized clearly that the cycle of sport continued on without them. The Boycott had a certain impact on both the timing and the conditions of leaving experienced by those athletes still active in 1980.

The final obstacle discussed as a barrier to continued participation was athlete-coach conflicts. From the three areas of concern, restricted personal freedom, collective retirement and sexual abuse, it was revealed that athletes perceived themselves as having little power to alter the conflict situations.

Throughout the entire section which details obstacles to continued participation, athletes discussed their perceptions of powerlessness within sport and their isolation after leaving. Many talked of perhaps making a 'come-back' or perhaps getting involved in some other capacity. Almost all maintained some measure of activity in their daily life styles after leaving high performance sport.

The second area discussed was *physical and social pressures to leave sport*. These were generally more subtle, surmountable barriers to continued participation which affected athletes individually. Sport age is introduced as a concept detailing the life of an athlete as she experienced her sport as a novice, international athlete, retired athlete. Sport age and chronological age were generally found to be delimiters of athletic longevity and only occasionally extenders of careers.

The special case of the World Master's Games was considered with particular interest in how returning athletes considered their retirement status. It is possible to conclude that oldness was integral to retired athletes' sense of identity and, in many ways contributed to the timing of retirement.

Some of the other pressures to retire were grouped together in a section entitled *life on hold*. This was perhaps the clearest representation of how a number of different factors such as school, family, children, finances and employment acted independently or in combination to initiate retirement.

In the third and final section, *appropriate timing*, the athletes reported that there was a best time to leave competitive sport. While they were active in sport, athletes learned the meaning of achieving one's potential and also, of leaving at the appropriate time. There was unanimous agreement amongst the athletes about the desirability of avoiding retirement at the wrong time. Further, as athletes learned about the cycles of athletic involvement, they also reported a sense of readiness for retirement through an awareness of each of their own progressions along the athletic path. Thus, a discussion of the importance of timing revealed athletes' perceptions about wanting to leave high performance sport at the right time and about this readiness to retire being built in to the athletic cycle.

The characteristics of leaving discovered in this chapter are numerous. First, retirement was precipitated prematurely by obstacles and pressures placed on athletes. Numerous events disrupted athletes' careers independent of athletes' actual skills and abilities and athletes reported having little or no control over their own leaving experiences at such times. Further, athletes in this study were affected differently by identical circumstances. Thus, premature retirement can be interpreted as happening to athletes rather than the athletes being willing participants in this process.

Second, the relevance of coaches' and athletes' expectations are important to how retirement is initiated and experienced. Coaches were generally perceived to be power-brokers and athletes as powerless in the coach-athlete relationship. From that position, coaches are perceived as orchestrating the retirement of some athletes, in some cases unfairly. Athletes' expectations concerning personal potential, ability, age, quality of sport experience and other goals in non-sport life most certainly mediated the longevity of the athletic career and the timing of retirement.

Third, the momentum of athletes' careers, particularly the degree of readiness to leave high performance sport, had considerable influence on how athletes were affected by obstacles, pressures and the like. A readiness to leave sport served to mederate of the effects of sudden and/or unexpected events which led to retirement.

Fourth, some athletes reported experiencing a form of compulsory retirement where athletes were moved out of the system to make room for incoming athletes. The system continued and athletes were moved in and out of the system. Age, in particular sport age, was reported as the critical element of compulsory retirement. This is closely related to a form of forced retirement described whereby athletes were retired 'for just cause' by the sport governing associations or the coaches. Athletes perceived having little or no control over the timing or the conditions of their leaving experiences and felt the effects most seriously if they were 'caught unawares'.

Fifth, some athletes developed a concept of oldness related to sport age. The 1976 Olympic athletes who competed at the World Master's Games were able to articulate how their feelings of oldness were banished by their returning sport abilities.

This illustrated the strength of the assumptions about increasing age and declining ability in athletes.

Finally, a number of questions are raised about what failed to appear in the recollections of the high performance athletes. There was little discussion of athletes' declining skills and abilities, of rituals or ceremonies of retirement, of the importance of family and friends in the decision-making around retirement, about the meaning of being retired and about post-retirement goals in sport. Thus, from an examination of the barriers to continued participation at the high performance level of sport, much of the diversity of events and individual experiences of the athletes was revealed. Many common characteristics of leaving were explored and other distinctive characteristics were discovered.

VII. CHAPTER SEVEN: NEARING LEAVING

A. INTRODUCTION

This is the last of four chapters exploring how female athletes report leaving high performance sport. In this chapter, three final conditions are explored; *balance of effort and benefit, identities of athletes* and *goals of athletes*. These conditions are important partly because of when they are experienced and also, how the athletes account for them.

These conditions are considered important for several reasons. First, they form part of how athletes make sense of or understand their retirement experiences. Second, this understanding developes only after retirement through athletes' reflections on their experiences. Third, descriptions of "Nearing Leaving" are synthesized over time. Athletes often reported their retirement experiences and then added, almost as an afterthought, the context and meaning of retirement by "filling in" the conditions which preceeded their retirement.

The argument developed in this chapter is that athletes' high performance sport experience, and particularly how they think of themselves in relation to that experience, is important to the beginning of the process of sport retirement. Just as athletes were generally unable to describe the sport structure (chapter three), they were only able to discuss "Nearing Leaving" after retirement when the impact of those conditions upon retirement became more evident.

Each of the three new conditions, *balance of effort and benefit, identities of athletes* and *goals of athletes* are discussed in turn.

B. BALANCE OF EFFORT AND BENEFIT

Balance of effort and benefit refers specifically to athletes' accounts of their sport experiences prior to retirement which include references to balances between effort (energy, costs etc.) and benefit (reward, opportunity, monetary support etc.). Further, the way athletes' make sense of "Nearing Leaving" influences how they understand their retirement experiences.

The athletes experienced sport in an ongoing, ever changing manner. The Canadian sport system did not provide athletes with a continually safe and viable membership and often, athletes failed to develop a sense of themselves in the system until after their involvement was reduced through retirement. Sport preparation generally involved a singular focus which excluded other aspects of living. Although a symbiotic relationship between athletes and the sport system logically would seem to encourage athletes' commitment in exchange for team membership and performance opportunities, that was seldom the case. However, the price of such commitments are frequently described (by the athletes) as being a balance between benefits obtained and the costs of obtaining them.

As balance problems arose, some athletes began to seriously consider leaving high performance sport. For example, one young athlete reported:

> I spent a lot of time swimming so I really had no energy to do anything else. The workouts were so intense that the spare time I had, I was asleep or in school or both. My friends were other swimmers and those I saw at school.
>
> (028:38)

Another attempted to maintain a precarious balance between her own school work as a graduate student, her teaching load and her athletic training.

> T. and I seemed to be the only ones trying to maintain an academic workload of any kind. She and I would go to school, then she would drive us to training, go for a morning workout, go back to the University, catch one or two more classes, then roar back to the training center for afternoon workout. I always seemed to have a pile of gym gear off my shoulder when I came back to teach my classes. I would prepare my lectures on the bus on my way to the university. I was always well prepared for my students. But my own assignments slid as a result. (022:57-60)

A third athlete, relating her experiences from the year prior to the Olympic Games, described the intense focus of her athletic life.

> My sport group was where all my energy went. A lot of the 1975-76 year, I can hardly remember. It was training and competition and the training was such an intense focus. I can remember training but I can't remember anything about my life. I remember vaguely that I took some courses. I have no idea if I passed them or dropped them. So it's almost like a black out. With the exception of the competition results, the three or four months prior to the Olympics are a blank. (015:62)

Some of the athletes experienced this single predominant focus which resulted in the general exclusion of other aspects of living. The first athlete described that the energy requirements of her sport preparation limited the amount of excess energy and time remaining for non-sport tasks. In contrast, the second athlete tried to do many other tasks in her daily routine and found that her academic course work slid when overlaps occurred. The third athlete described an intense focus on sport that allowed no room for other commitments. As an athlete, she was so involved in the pursuit of excellence that she could not even recall other concurrent events in her life. Obviously, the single intense sport focus involved a substantial commitment of time and energy from the athletes and affected the manner in which they lived their non-sport lives. For some, this evolved into a perception that life was too focussed on sport. For others, this resulted in a "full plate" kind of daily existence where time and energy management were essential.

In return for this primary, intense focus on training, the athletes hoped for, even expected, certain benefits such as being named to the National Team, competing for Canada and more generally, being part of Canada's 'family of athletes'. The athletes received regular information about upcoming competitions and criteria for advancement (eg. performance standards, anticipated team sizes, opportunities for specific testing and training) either directly from their sport organizations or through their coaches. Some received partial funding to attend competitions and to meet daily expenses incurred through training. Others did not.

The relationships between the athletes and their sport organizations were not always completely symbiotic. Some athletes reported clear imbalances in decision-making whereby the sport organization had the majority of the control and the athletes had the least. For example, selection procedures were virtually always necessary in order to name a National Team. Some athletes consistently "made the teams" while others did not. The process of team selection was reported to be sometimes a random or even arbitrary process where organizations would "show" their power to the athletes.

> The coaches got into having everybody do all the tests together.. We were just incredibly overloaded for our experience but it sure separated the wheat from the chaff. (008:36)

Despite this overload, this particular athlete was named to every National Team in her sport between 1973 and 1980 after which retired. Another athlete's experiences were less consistent. She was named to the National Team for one year early in her competitive career and then was not named the two succeeding years.

> I was disillusioned at that point because I had trained all year hoping I would make that team. I was much fitter than some of the players but the coach decided to take a couple of older players with experience instead of the young players. Like any selection, there was a real division among the players over whether (the coaches) had done the right thing or not. It was just after that that Canada was awarded the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal and I knew that if I could continue to train, I could definitely make that. It was a real turning point for me to decide to continue to play. (015:40)

This athlete was then successful in being named to all National Teams from 1973 to 1977.

Even though her involvement at the high performance level was not continuous, she could identify a real turning point where she decided that to continue would be beneficial, i.e. she would be able to reach her goals.

As discussed in previous chapters the work or effort athletes put into training did not always "pay off". Sometimes, the athletes perceived this as a degree of unfairness in the relationship between themselves and the sport organization. For example, when one of the above athletes retired from high performance sport, it was because the coach asked her to leave to make room for younger inexperienced players. Even though her similar early experience with not being named to the team gave her some insight to the problem, she stated

> It was clear to me that benefits would not always fall upon those who deserved it or worked hardest...but that there would be problems and corruption happening. (015:41)

The emerging pattern is that the athletes were expected, and expected of themselves, an almost total commitment to their sport organization. In return, the sport organization promised to take care of the athletes as long as the athletes met the performance standards of the organization.

In an optimal relationship, the athletes and the sport organization would be mutually beneficial and continually supportive. Instead, these athletes reported being "useful" to the sport organization only when they were top performers and met the goals of the sport organization. Further, the sport organizations were able to arbitrarily terminate the relationship. Some athletes did not believe their sport organizations were responsible or behaved in an accountable fashion. Athletes could terminate their relationship with the sport organization but were unlikely to do so while committed to performing. Further, athletes recalled learning "not to quit", "to obey" and "to leave when done". They had little if any input into the nature of their competitive experience. Thus, when a total commitment and a single focus combined with athletes' lack of control over goal achievement, an ominous 'pressure cooker' situation in which 'something has to give' became apparent.

Additional pressures beyond those inherent to being named to the National Team were also part of some athletes' experiences. As one athlete indicated, she considered herself a reference point for younger athletes.

> Venerable old S. they call me (laughter)! I feel that, about athletes particularly, there's a time. You have a span where you can do good, as far as

> organizations are concerned. Then, you outlive your usefulness or you start to get sour and frustrated. I suffered burnout. That's too general a term for what I am feeling. It was really that the younger, keen athletes were using me as a reference point. It's so hard to stay on top, you know. (006:72-73)

Another described herself as "a bit of a shit disturber"! Though not named to the National Team, she found herself "called-back" year after year to play international matches for them:

> Actually, I kind of burned the candle at both ends. I did it for a couple of reasons. First, I thought, for my own good, I can't go back to (my sport) every year. It's not good for my career. I really should get on with life, get money, get doing something. I didn't want to go back after 1984. The second reason was the coach was lousy. I thought I'd do what I could to make a change. I said quite openly what I thought should be done. Being captain, I was obliged to make the point known. I made it known that it was more than just my opinion, too. It was my own frustration that led me to do that. So the coach and I mutually agreed that it was just as well that I left. I'm 30 now and I have to get serious about life. (012:87)

The athlete indicated that sport involvement was not good for her career. However, despite the discrepancy between what was good for her work and what was not, she continued to be involved in high performance sport year after year. This athlete's expectations of herself were different than her expectations of other athletes on the team.

One way of viewing the above experiences is to recognize the occurrance of a mutual disengagement between the athletes and their respective sport organizations. The first athlete discussed outliving her usefulness to the sport organization and simultaneously found it difficult to 'stay on top'. The other athlete reflected on a mutual amicable agreement between herself and the coach about her leaving. In either case, the athlete and the sport organization may be seen as better able to continue without each other and so, agree to separate.

Another way of viewing these same experiences is to note the athletes' shift of energy away from total commitment. The first athlete mentions 'burnout' and the beginnings of being 'sour and frustrated'. The other athlete was positioned to make a choice between just being an athlete or being a responsible captain. As captain, she felt obliged to be critical of the coach. The result was that she risked her athlete status to be a good captain but did so at a time when she was ready to leave the sport. At thirty years of age, she felt she had to get serious about life[39]. Thus, both athletes left high performance sport at a time when they were less than totally committed and ready to move beyond being an athlete.

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[39] It may be that athletes discover they can not remain serious about their high performance involvement forever. As a way of retionalizing and to avoid any

In the next group of examples, the different meanings that athletes develop for similar experiences are explored. In light of the 'balance of effort and benefit' perceptions, the perceived cost of remaining competitive varied greatly among the athletes. That is, for some, the physical demands of sport outweighed the athletes' willingness to continue. It was not the sport organization that altered an athlete's position in a group, but rather a decreasing ability to physically perform when necessary[60].

One athlete suffered a debilitating shoulder injury two full years before the selections for the 1976 Olympic Games. She spoke of her experiences in the following manner.

> In a way I wish I could have worked harder. I felt gipped. Some of them didn't go to school even. They trained eight hours a day and I knew what they put into it. But I also felt tremendously for them putting in that kind of time, those hours, dropping everything else. I felt it was much more 100% for them than for me. Competing those last two years was hell. Only one thing kept me going. I thought, if I quit, a lot of people would be disappointed. I wanted to prove that I could make it, to myself. That was my goal. It was so competitive and so close. We were all fighting for just three spots. (013:47)

This athlete was selected for the 1976 team, competed in Montreal and then never again competed in that sport. The cost of achieving the Olympic goal varied substantially even among the athletes on that team.

Another athlete paid a tremendous price in order to continue competing in her sport. In June of 1975, she had a spectacular fall.

> I got up and I just felt like everything had sprung. It was a strange feeling. As I hit the ground, I thought "You made a wrong decision a week ago and now you're going to pay for it". I felt that it was something that I contributed to. Well, I got up and what I felt mostly was I knew that one of my legs was broken and so I sort of had all my weight on my left leg and, as it turned out, that wasn't nearly the most serious part. Both my knees, everything, ligaments, cartilage, everything was totally gone. My arm, my wrist and my collarbone were broken, and my right leg was broken - the tibia. (029:36)

After six months in hospital and intense physiotherapy, this athlete was again training. She was successful in her bid to be named to the Canadian Olympic Team in June of 1976, one year from the date of the accident. The athlete was warned at that time by her physician that if she continued training in her Olympic sport, she would be in a wheelchair within five

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[59](cont'd) stigma attached to being a retired athlete, they indicate having to "get serious about life". It is unclear if this is generalized among the athletes.

[60] This is discussed at much greater length in chapter seven detailing conditions of leaving due to injuries and/or ill health.

years. Despite the warnings, the athlete continued for two more seasons after 1976.

In both cases, the athletes were faced head-on with the realization that their bodies were destructible. They continued only as long as they could physically manage the wear and tear on their bodies. While some sports make negligible demands on competitive athletes, others result in particularly high *wear and tear* and for these athletes in the higher risk sports, even if they had been willing to continue, their bodies were simply 'worn down' by increasing physical disabilities. It was only a matter of time before the above athletes had to leave their competitive pursuits.

Finally, in the area of 'balance of effort and benefit' perceptions, athletes discussed ongoing financial support as they continued to train. Financial assistance is not always a positive benefit to continuing athletes. While some athletes did regard financial support as essential, others considered financial support to be a draw-back to the positive quality of their sport experiences. An examination of the nature of financial exchanges between athletes and supporting organizations as the athletes perceived them is illustrative of the importance generally of financial assistance and downplays the importance of the amount received.

One athlete received financial assistance throughout her university years and then retired when the funding ceased.

> I wouldn't have wanted to go to school and not had a scholarship. I wanted to race. And, who wants to pay for their own schooling? It's kind of like being in your own sorority. So, why go there and not be part of the group? I guess it's a prestige thing to get a scholarship. And they pay everything except spending money. I had another scholarship for that, an academic scholarship. (017:61-63)

In a very literal sense, the athlete maintained a financial balance in her life by attending school and competing as an athlete. Even though the athlete believed that she had earned her scholarship, she reported struggling with what she perceived as unfair federal government support for selected athletes.

> Initially, when they brought in the carding system, you had to be in the top eight in the world. Then they started only counting two per country. That really bugged me because I was 9th straight off but someone else would have 12 Americans ahead of them knocked off (the list) and be eligible for money that I was not eligible for. My scholarship took care of me while I was on it though. I did take one year off and they (the university) took it away. When I left I put it in jeopardy but I did get it back when I returned. I never wanted to get off it. It was a kind of security. (017:65-66)

The athlete felt she was earning her financial assistance and regarded it as a positive, essential, part of athletic experience.

This was not so for all athletes. Another athlete spoke of 'too much benefit - not enough self'; that is, too much financial support and not enough accountability by the athletes.

> I felt like a fraud being in Europe at all those competitions. I was never really satisfied with all those races. It was all heaped upon me so quickly. There was a lot of wavering. It was wonderful in terms of excellent marks. I performed what I didn't think was very good and got all the neat trips. I didn't realize it then but now I see I was in a minor depression at the time. Nothing was really interesting or exciting. So I think I didn't feel I earned those trips. It started slowly in 1978 and I became really conscious of it later. (011:77)

In her personal estimation, the athlete had not earned the trips and therefore, felt she competed undeservedly.

Another athlete spoke primarily of the financial support heaped upon her, agreed that there was too much benefit and commented on the resulting sense of a false existence. The athlete had been very successful and as one of the medal hopes for 1976, she was sent to California in February of the Olympic year to train.

> Suddenly, I had all the time in the world to train. I used to do a morning training alone, but in California, I was getting up later and later. Soon, it was 10:00 a.m. and I couldn't face the morning run. It was a false existence. I was living, during the camp, in a single flat with no furniture. All my expenses were taken care of. Sport Canada provided it all for me. Soon, I realized that I wasn't happy at all with myself. I needed structure to train. In California, there were no time slots. I'm critical now of how freely Sport Canada gives out money whether or not it is essential to athlete development.
>
> I would have lived and trained much better if I stayed at home before the 1976 Games. So much was given to the athletes, so they took it. They were given too much and didn't know what to do with it. In training camp, I had time to become obsessed with my inability to get out and train without being pushed. Also, in the false existence, I became obsessed with what I ate. If I would have eaten better and had some support, then I wouldn't have gotten anorexic. At the training camp, I went from being into everything to sitting and doing nothing. By the time I got to Montreal, I was flat. I felt the worst I'd ever felt about my training. I'd placed every training time ahead of everything else in my life including my marriage. I was ready to quit. I was so disappointed.
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> My sport became my work, not my hobby. School, work and being a wife were just non-existent. I only trained. I liked doing the other things and then creating some flexibility for sport competitions. When something went well in any area, it all went well. However, when nothing went well, well, absolutely nothing did. So when I had only my training to focus on, I couldn't do it well. I competed in my event in Montreal but I just couldn't wait to get it over with. And that wasn't like me at all. (020:47-51)

For this athlete, the financial assistance was the undoing of her basic existence pattern. Too much assistance given at an inopportune time and with specific strings attached which resulted in poor training conditions for an otherwise well-prepared athlete. Her comment about being ready to quit at any moment perhaps illustrates the delicate nature of the balance.

From the examples about financial assistance, differing views about the essentialness of financial support are evident. One athlete regarded financial help as essential to her competive career. Another two athletes considered it to be of borderline assistance, possibly beneficial but too abundant for them. Too much of a good thing was debilitating for some athletes.

To summarize, the simple adage of 'balance of effort and benefit' is not indicative of the reality of some high performance female athletes. By looking more closely at the subtler aspects of the athlete / sport organization relationship, the links between sport experience and retirement become somewhat clearer.

First, some athletes recalled their athletic experiences as single intense foci which were exclusionary of many other aspects of general living. For their dedication and ability, the athletes anticipated being named to Canada's Olympic Team. Logic suggests that not all athletes so dedicated and able would have been named to the 1976 Olympic Team. However, in this study, only successful athletes were surveyed.

Second, not all athletes occupied equal or identical positions with teammates on the selected teams. These different positions apparently lead to different expectations for the athletes by themselves and by coaches and often directly influenced how retirement was experienced.

Third, the relationship beteeen athletes and their representative sport orgainzations was frequently reported as unbalanced with the balance of power belonging to the organizations. Often, organizations were not viewed as accountable for what they did with that power. Questionable selection procedures and financial assistance programs were perceived, by the athletes, as misuses or abuses of such power.

Finally, athletes in some sports experienced great physical stress and / or risk which contributed to increased debility of the athletes. Particular sports increased the physical *wear and tear* on the body more rapidly than others. Some overcame the physical cost of competition and continued despite serious injuries. Others lasted just until the Olympic Games and then left competiton. In this way, athletes' physical histories were major influences on their retirement experiences.

C. IDENTITIES OF ATHLETES

In the relationship between the athletes and their sport organizations, athletes' self-perceptions and how others sought to define the athletes has some bearing on how the athletes view their athletic experiences, including leaving. Many perceptions and definitions form athlete identity. For example, many athletes reported that they felt a very one-sided development of themselves, that one-side being the competitor. Others described themselves as high achievers who happened to get involved in high performance sport but who were also capable performers in a number of different skill areas. Still others rejected the label "athlete" for themselves although they used it to describe others who were their sport peers.

Included in the varying perceptions these women had of themselves, being an athlete and in particular, being an Olympic athlete is what Matthews (1979:71) would name as a "pivotal social identity, one that others impute". For some athletes, such an identity was problematic. For others, the identity was both desirable and necessary. This is not to infer that adopting the label "athlete" made for good adjustment to being a competitor. However, as the athletes spoke of themselves the richness of the self-definitions emerged.

It is through these that athletes' identities are linked with subsequent leaving experiences and have proved crucial to this research. An examination of the interviews reveals several different patterns of athlete identity. Although not all of those interviewed fit into the patterns, they are perhaps useful landmarks of the diversity of identities which were expressed by the athletes.

The Natural Identity

The first identity pattern is what many of the athletes describe as natural. That is, natural identity consisted of a relatively positive integral link between sport and non-sport life experiences. One characteristic of this natural identity pattern was what athletes referred to as carry-overs between sport and non-sport living. As one athlete commented,

> Many people can work hard but do they have the capability of being outstanding. You know, when I was younger I thought that I would feel negative towards "defective human beings". I don't at all though. I have complete understanding. I have many plusses...and they do too. But not a lot

> and that doesn't seem fair to me. I think I have minuses too... all these negatives. If I could have broken them down, I would not be so broken down now. I've always thought I was capable of a great deal. (008:86-88)

The athlete recognized her special abilities as being similar to those of the differently abled. It was a curious comparison, an Olympic athlete and a "defective" (differently abled) human being. Yet, the athlete indicated that both she and they were exceptional people in similar ways.

Another athlete reported a similar carry-over from non-sport to sport experiences. For her, a sense of being a complete person incorporated the athlete identity. As an equestrain athlete, this completeness of identity also included her perceptions about the horses she rode. Of herself, she recalled

> I liked being different. I had my own style. I've never felt an obligation to go to high school proms. In my sport, I can go and do it and be by myself. I'm creating my world in my own way. Even as a kid, I was angry. If I hadn't gotten into sport, I'd have been in trouble bombing buildings or something. To preserve my own identity, I had to do something uniquely different. That's who I was as an athlete. (029:68)

And of the horses she rode, she said

> How can I best accomodate what this other athlete is as an entity? A horse has to jump out of total confidence, to do it totally for you, the rider. The chances of making a mistake are far less when the horse is allowed to be creative and solve the problem. Me, as a rider, I liked the aloneness of it and just that it's just such an aesthetic thing to do. (029:28)

From these quotes, there is a sense that the athlete grew into her sport and brought her non-sport energy into sport. She also brought her interpretation of her identity into her understanding of herself as an athlete and of the horses she rode.

At a somewhat different level, other athletes linked the skills developed in sport to skills used later in their workplaces. First, one athlete's vivid description of her preparadness as both athlete and lawyer:

> There is an amazing part of competition, which is what competition makes you do. It makes you much better than you can be any other day of the week. That part of it just crystalizes at that moment. And you always know, a week before competition I'd wake up with a terrible attack of nerves and be really glad because that means my psyche was working...It's like a kettle and put it on the stove and you take it off just before it starts to sing and you know, that's the interesting part of being a competitor. I learned to read my body well; what it was telling me about the feeling psychologically about the upcoming competition. I miss that part. I miss it but I don't want to do it.
>
> Solitary. I was actually aware I think on some level, although I'm not sure just how consciously one of the real tests of being a competitor as they are counting you down 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 , is that you are totally thrown back on yourself in such an immediate way that it just about takes your breath away. And now, I'm sitting here at midnight making arguments, I'm really tired after five days of 20 hour days, trying to think of an argument that's going to

> capture the imagination of the panel or the judge or whomever and it's exactly the same feeling, exactly. Just before you have to cross-examine a tough witness who knows that you can make or break your case, it's the same sort of thing. (029:94-96)

Thus, there was a positive link between being an athlete and later being a lawyer, that of a solitary sense of self-dependence. The same thread continued through many areas of the athlete's life.

A third characteristic of the natural identity pattern is the lack of separation between the individual and as an athlete and the individual as a total person. Several athletes recognized the potential to become one-sided in sport and resisted by keeping their options open and their focus varied. As one athlete clearly reported,

> I never had to put the different parts of life into an order and choose. There were other things I didn't give up; my friends and my social life were incredibly important. I felt "if I can't fit it, I don't want to be one-sided. I don't want it (sport) to be my everything." I wanted it to be enough to get to the Olympics but, because of injuries, there was a big chance I wouldn't make it. I never lost hope. I felt I had the potential. But, I thought that I had to be reasonable, keep my options open. I always felt I had to have a back up and that was a large reason for my various focusses. If I had been at the very top, it might have been different but I was never ranked at the top consistently. I was always second or third. (013:38)

Not only did this athlete report on her refusal to be drawn into a one-sided development but she qualified her refusal with a rider about only being nationally ranked second or third. This example introduces the idea that athlete identity might vary in accordance with the athlete's ranking or position and status in her sport.

The natural identity pattern is characterized by athletes' descriptions of wholeness or completeness of identity. The carry-overs between sport and non-sport life were described as beneficial learning which occurred in one area and proved to be useful in another area. Further, some athletes considered the degree of integration of their athlete-self and their non-sport self to be an essential and beneficial quality of their lives. However, athletes who generally described themselves as whole or complete persons also reported being fairly positive and relatively objective about their sport experiences.

The Non-Athlete Identity

The second identity pattern is characterized by the absence of an athletic identity within athletes' self-perceptions. Moreover, these athletes discussed their conceptions of what an "athlete" was but reiterated that their personal self-definition was not in agreement. These athletes also reported resisting being labelled as athletes by others.

Several athletes, for example, reported a reluctance to refer to themselves as athletes. Despite the fact that they were Olympians, they recalled being ambivalent about whether that qualified them as true athletes. Amazingly, they did not agree that simply being an Olympian, i.e.: experiencing Olympic competition, qualified them as athletes. A National Team athlete from 1973 to 1978 described her reluctance to call herself an athlete in the following manner.

> I don't currently consider myself an athlete. Athletes do a lot of sports well. I am really uncoordinated in a lot of sports. My sport is not easily transferable to other sports. Track and field is. Gymnastics is. But not my sport. It's so difficult. I had to start learning other sports at 19. It was tough to learn. I couldn't even throw a ball. Besides, it had been 15 years since I had been a novice or beginner in my sport. It was hard to find that frame of mind. It's not that I am too proud to learn. It's that I'm so embarrassed because I am so unskilled. I couldn't hide because I have such a high profile and some even know that I have had an Olympic medal around my neck. (024:67)

This athlete described a discrepancy existing between what an athlete should be and what she felt herself to be. The operative word in her description may be 'currently'. Clearly, this athlete's definition of an athlete was much broader than her own experiences as an Olympian and thus, she was reluctant to identify herself as an athlete. However, the extension of the athlete's definition would exclude those women who pursued a single intense focus in sport precisely that which athletes and coaches consider essential to the production of world class performances.

Another woman reluctant to call herself an athlete pointed to the narrowness of the definition of the word as being problematic.

> Athlete, it's like 'you - now'. It's just me using my body and being more aware of it, more now than I ever was and responding to what it needs and doesn't need...not giving it what it needs. I am learning how to read it. I'd never considered myself as an athlete even when I was, so to speak, an athlete. Maybe what it is, is a focus. I competed in my sport most of the time because it was a convenient thing to do. In the last year and a half, that's changed. Then, I really made a decision that my sport was really what I wanted to be doing and it wasn't just a convenience to get me places. I can see that it would take a lot of a commitment to call yourself an athlete.
>
> (018-19:109-111)

The paradox is evident in the athlete's comment: "I'd never considered myself an athlete even when I was, so to speak". The narrowness this athlete described was not with regard to sport skills (the previous example) but was in reference to a commitment to a particular sport.

A third example reinforces the argument that the definition of the label "athlete" can be too narrow particularly when it is assigned by others.

> It depends on how you see yourself. I saw myself as a kid who still liked horses, who happened to like my Olympic sport, and who still didn't know what she wanted to be when she grew up; perhaps a veterinarian. But, she had all kinds of other things on her mind. Calling me an athlete didn't acknowledge all those other things were going on. When you say someone is an athlete, you don't think they have artistic abilities or academic abilities or whatever. (And further) when you use the word athlete or Olympian, it's difficult. Sometimes I leave it out so that I can avoid the change in people. But it leaves a big chunk out of my life history. You're not as understood as you'd like to sometimes be. (018-19:110-112)

Here, the athlete gives credence to her all-encompassing self-definition at the expense of her athlete definition. Her sister, also an Olympian at the 1976 Olympic Games, added that:

> When you use the word Olympic, I think there are two ways of looking at it. One is the way I feel about my experiences. Another might be what other people interpret it to be...not my experience but what the Olympic experience must be. If they aren't compatible, it's difficult to use that word. I feel quite good about my experience so I'm not too hesitant about saying I'm an athlete but it took me a long time to get to that point. Maybe by about 1980, I started to believe I really was an athlete. (018-19:116)

Together these examples illustrate that various definitions of 'athlete' are used by high performance female athletes. Also, some Olympians have a definition of an athlete that goes far beyond the definition predicated by Olympic attendance or competitive success.

Difficulties arise when the term 'athlete' is used by individuals outside of high performance sport to impute the identity of an Olympian. Difficulties reported by athletes in this research were (a) changes in others' attitudes toward Olympians, (b) misunderstanding by others, and (c) misrepresentations by others.

In (a), changes in others' attitudes towards Olympians, one athlete suggested that "they might think I am something greater than I am". There is a disjuncture between the athlete's self-definition and the imputed definition of others. She solved the apparent problem by leaving out "a chunk of history". She did not itemize her Olympic experience on job applications because she did not want others to think of her as exceptional.

In (b), misunderstanding by others, the athletes' concerns may be described as disjunctures between the reality of what constitutes athletes' Olympic experience and what others consider that experience to be. One athlete summed up this disjuncture by saying "the general public out there wants to deify sport". Thus, perhaps the public is not only naive about high performance sport but is also unwilling to criticize it.

In (c), misrepresentations by others, there may be an unwitting perception by some of the public that the Olympic experience must have been a good one for the athletes. In some ways, this simplistic view presents barriers of communication particularly for the athlete who did not have a good experience. As one athlete reported, she seldom introduced herself as an Olympic competitor because invariably, the listeners would respond with "It must have been wonderful. Did you win a medal?". Rather than trying to educate the listeners about the facts of her sport experience, about how it was landmarked by long periods of physical exhaustion and tedious, nerve-wracking selection procedures, she felt obliged to talk about the wonderful opening and closing ceremonies. The discomfort created by this ambivalence commonly led to the athlete to omit introducing her Olympic experience.

Generally, Olympians who did not call themselves athletes or did so only after they had left high performance competition (as in the last of the three examples), reported some ambivalence towards the term 'athlete' and/or it's perceived meaning to the general public. Some athletes reported that the term 'athlete' is too narrow. Others reported that it is too broad. To still others, the term fails to encapsulate the totality of being an Olympian. There was no evidence of athletes reacting to the notion of females as Olympians. In any event, while the understanding of the label "athlete" is as diverse as the number of women in this study using it, how these women identified themselves had an impact on how they subsequently discussed leaving high performance sport.

The Separated Identity: Something is Missing

The third identity pattern is charcterized by a separation of sport and non-sport life. For some athletes, the separation meant an incomplete identity. That is, they reported feeling incomplete both as athletes and as non-athletes. For others, the separation meant feeling complete as athletes but not as persons outside of sport. Still others described themselves as being complete as athletes and as non-athletes although they kept the two parts of their lives separate (co-existing). The developing themes in this section concern athletes role-strain and possible alienation from their potential or optimal identities. In this third identity pattern, all the women did however, call themselves athletes.

Within this third identity pattern, several athletes described themselves as one-sided and ambivalent about their experiences as high performance athletes. One athlete, involved in a team sport that had frequently changed coaches and philosophies over the preceeding five years, described her pre-Olympic self-identity as:

> ...a hard worker. I worked for a whole year before the Olympics thinking about that singleness of purpose. The whole year, I was fighting with myself, asking "Is this everything? Should this be everything? What else is there? How important is this?". I was going out with a fellow then and I felt like I was missing something, like I was not natural, that I was missing out on real life or something. I never felt like a freak or regretted playing the sport but feeling torn that way, that maybe there was more to life, something more well rounded. There had to be something more than when you trained and played.
>
> (027:43)

She felt the unevenness of her personal development, sensed that incompleteness but did not withdraw from her sport at that time. In effect, she put the concerns 'on hold' until after the following season when she retired.

Another athlete from a large and very athletic family, described her experience as a 'dependent' athlete. The one-sidedness of her development, she felt, was intentionally coached into her in order to maximize her performances.

> The coaches don't coach athletes to become independent thinkers. If you are an independent thinker, I don't think you're totally dependent on your coach. If you are dependent, you won't go from your coach (change clubs) because you don't have the confidence. You'll stay with your coach because your coach makes you great, not yourself. (Now as a Coach), I coach the total person. They are real kids and I wanted to teach the whole person in them. I guess that's how I wanted to be treated when I was young. I was always concerned about 'the being' in people. I was lucky in the way my experiences fell together. I can take with me all those competive years... like dedication, allotment of time and my sense of being. (024:58, 67)

From this, it is evident that one-sidedness was encouraged by this athlete's coach (coaches) and she described increasingly bitter feelings towards the end of her competitive career. She also spoke of a low level of self-confidence particularly in the final competitive year, a feeling which then carried over into her activities after leaving sport.

Both of the above examples illustrate the one-sided development of athletes fostered by organized competitive sport. The athletes reported difficulties with remaining in sport once they became concerned about their one-sided development.

The One Sided, Focused Athlete Identity

The next three examples differ qualitatively from the preceeding athlete identity examples. These athletes described themselves as whole or complete athletes despite their one-sided development. One athlete, a medallist in the 1976 Olympic Games, described that moment when all the effort and pain and struggle and good times culminated in that long awaited sense of achievement.

> The greatness was fleeting...actually that sums it up. There is a being and an athlete and you just can't separate them. So when I won my first medal at the Olympics, I knew that only the athlete was there. I'd left lots of me behind. (024:76)

By medal standards, it is evident that the athlete was successful as a competitor. After the Olympics, she wrote in her diary

> It all became a game. Where was the reality when you couldn't include your whole person in it? To me, it's a game to separate me from another part of me and to have mental control over only one part. But, to say the other part (real life) just doesn't exist is another. Where is reality? People are dying out there. And we are crying over being disqualified from events. When I realized that, I changed. Now, I am a better person for it. (024:41)

The divisions between real life and sport are evidenced in that quote. The acknowledgement of "People are dying out there" was particularly important in bringing the athlete to the realization about what was real (life generally) and what ceased to be real (sport) for her. The athlete's identity changed through her sport experience and she was able to describe some of the turning points of those changes.

The second example of the one-sided but complete athlete identity pattern, pre-Olympic preparations are important to identity formation.

> One of my coaches would try to whittle you down and then try to remold you in his image of you. The people who played for him...it was almost cultish at times. They were the kind who would run through walls. He really pushed me. He pushed me to my limits and fatigue barriers. When you leave (his coaching) you don't always like him but you like yourself.
>
> I've always been this schizophrenic kind of person and ever since I was in high school, I was an English major. I wasn't a jock. I wasn't a stereotyped athlete. I prided myself on having this other me. I went so quickly from high school to the National Team that I think it was a bit of over kill. It took me two years to suddenly stop and say "What else is there?". Suddenly, the only kind of people I saw were athletes. I always suffered as an athlete from a lack of confidence. I didn't see how I could reach my potential. In that last year before the Olympics, that evolved in me as an athlete. I remember thinking "I finally feel like everything is coming together". (027:45,48)

This athlete described gradually becoming more focussed on being an athlete over her competitive career. Again, the coaches were seen to have a role in encouraging this intense focus. This singular sport focus did not stop the athlete from treasuring her own non-sport identity as non-jock. Despite the fluctuations in identity patterns that the athlete experienced, she resolved the confusions by concentrating on bringing everything together to better perform as an athlete.

The third example of the one-sided ~~but~~ complete development is illustrated by the very narrow focus that one athlete adopted.

> Before the Olympics, my peers were athletes and I think I was like any athlete. I wasn't that unique about my abilities but I was probably unique in terms of my tenacity. Also, I was probably unique in terms of competitive edge...not giving up. But there was a lack of confidence there; a need to practise that was really high. In terms of average people, I have no idea because I think that's what my life was. I could only measure it that way. A woman who is struggling to raise her kids and has a man that beats her is very unique about how tenacious she is in her ability to stick it out and stay even though it's ridiculous economically and emotionally. So, I don't know. I didn't know much about other people because I had lived in a very narrow sport world for a long time. I developed so unevenly. It took me a long time to be whole afterwards. (027:68)

The unevenness of this athlete's development did not seem to be of concern until she left this competitive sportsworld. She subsequently recalled that ~~it was~~ a real turning point that brought her uneven development into focus: she was fired from a non-sport position. Then, and only then, did she recognize the difficulties of 'being an athlete in a world of non-athletes".

The previous three examples illustrate what some athletes have described as being 'together' as athletes but not as totally developed persons. The division between the sport and non-sport world is important to some and a non-issue for others in terms of their personal identity. What is clear is that identity changes over time and what may have been problematic for an athlete at one moment in time may cease to be problematic at a later time. Also, some of the athletes identified turning points where realizations or circumstances facilitated changes in identity. Further, it was generally during the moments of change that the athletes recognized how one-sided their athlete development had been.

The following two examples are illustrative of how athletes inhabit their non-sport and competitive sport worlds simultaneously. Inhabiting two worlds is not always a comfortable experience particularly when the two worlds are kept separate. One described how uncomfortable she was with the two separate identities that she had to maintain in order to live in the two worlds. Another reporting two separate identities co-existing.

> A lot of my identity was in sport and with the people I was with and who I felt I was doing it for. I felt a lot of the time, I was doing it for my coach or for others or the recognition that it got me. When I started, it had all been all for me but that changed. When 1979 came along, I suddenly realized the two ways I saw myself; as a student and as involved in sport as an athlete. I would be leaving both at the same time. They had been combined for so long.
>
> Those identities started to get lost when I got injured. Before then, I'd never quit anything. Everything I'd done had come easily to me and if it didn't come easy, I didn't do it. There was always other areas where I could excell with very little effort. That injury was the first time that I was working hard and not getting the rewards I should. And then, in other areas such as school, I wasn't working hard but I was doing really well. So there was this real conflict happening. And all that time I was being told that I was a hard worker but not having that image of myself. They were quite separate, me the athlete and me the student...not integrated at all. And there were two levels of confidence too; how I projected myself to others (confident and outgoing) and how I thought about myself (always having to prove myself and win other people's approval). There was always a real underlying sense of unworthiness. (011:86-88)

Another athletes presented perhaps the clearest discussion of two separate co-existing identities.

> My school teaching and my sport were fairly closely inclined. I could train at the school for example. But what I was as a teacher was not the same person I was on the water. On the water, I was equal with everyone else. As a teacher, I felt it important to establish a distance. So I was two different people co-existing at the same time and those two didn't cross over very well. My personal life at the time was non-existent. It's hard to establish a social life when you have to go to bed at 9:00 every night. (001)

Both athletes were fully aware of the connections between the non-sport and the competitive sport world. The first athlete recalled feeling unworthy in both worlds; the second recalled feeling in charge of the way she managed her worlds. Both athletes managed two separate worlds concurrently. .

Identity Summary

To summarize, in understanding the importance of how the athletes defined themselves, it is important to recognize the range of identities described; this diversity casts considerable doubt on the accuracy of the stereotype of a happy, productive athlete working extremely hard to reach a competitive goal. First, there were athletes who saw themselves positively. They were able to integrate sport experience and non-sport experience in generally meaningful ways and reported a sense of wholeness and completeness in their sense of identity.

Second, there were athletes who considered themselves to be or to have been one-sided in their development as athletes. Some found that to be problematic. Others did not. However, one-sided development made remaining in high performance sport difficult for some athletes and in that way, contributed to their retirement experience.

Third, there were athletes who were reluctant to call themselves athletes. This ambivalence, they explained, was their personal concept of an athlete simply did not agree with their personal sense of identity. For some, the definition was too broad; for others too narrow. Some were also concerned about how the definition could be inaccurately imputed by others.

Other athletes spoke of identity ambivalence in a different day. Some were ambivalent about being too one-sided in their development. Some were ambivalent about maintaining two separate social worlds, one in sport, the other non-sport. The ambivalence was, in many instances, recognized and accepted. In other instances, identity dissonance was described whereby the identity definitions were regarded as conflictual.

This brings us to the fourth point, that of identity dissonance. Not all athletes were anchored in their athletic identity. What they did as athletes (behaviour) was not always in agreement with who they perceived themselves to be (part of identity). When such dissonance was present, some athletes found it intolerable and sought change. Others were able to function for an extended time with the dissonance. It appears that the resolution of such conflict was not a high priority either for the active or the retiring athletes.

Fifth, there appear to be important links between individual sense of athletic identity, positive or negative regard for that identity, imputations by others and changes in that identity over time. Not all athletes considered themselves athletes and therefore, it appears that programs developed to assist athletes with the process of identity management during or post-retirement need to be aware of these significant variations.

Finally, there is some concern on the researcher's part throughout this section that these women may have developed an conception of their identity as athletes after leaving competitive sport. It is impossible to ascertain how the passage of time influenced the accuracy of their recall about identity. However, given the precision with which they were able to recall particular events and thoughts, it is presumed that their reflections on identity are accurate. Since becoming an athlete and later retiring are integral to the process of living for these athletes, there seems little point in pursuing precisely when the identities altered or took on new direction. Rather, the interrelations between athlete biography and sport experience are clearly inter-connected with the readiness to leave competitive sport.

D. GOALS OF ATHLETES

Goals are those achievements which athletes reasonably expect to carry out during their athletic careers. Often these goals are defined by boundaries such as specific events or limits of time. Analysis of this research reveals that goals and goal setting processes had significance for how these women lived their athletic lives. That is, the goals appeared to be a part of the energy and structure which formed the ongoing, forward moving current of athletes' careers, their *career momentum*.

The two broad goal categories described in this third and final section of "Nearing Leaving" are Olympic goals and peak goals. Each contains a great diversity of information which is represented here in its fullest practical form. The two areas are not exclusive but rather share a somewhat fuzzy boundary.

Olympic Goals

Amazingly enough, not all athletes who were named to the 1976 Olympic team considered the Olympic Games as their primary sport goal. Although the majority of the athletes shared common experiences an enormous diversity of sport goals was apparent Given this reality, it was appropriate to ask the athletes about their high performance goals as they recalled them from early in their athletic careers.

The most common response to the question of high performance goals indicates that Olympic goals were not particularly clear through the whole athletic experience.

> I think when I first heard there would be a women's team at the Olympics, in 1973, I thought it would be great to go there. It wasn't a realistic goal but I thought it'd be great to do that. As the years 1973, 1974, 1975 went by, it became more realistic. (026:20)

An Olympic goal appears to become more meaningful as it becomes a more concrete possibility. This is reflected in the words of a woman who attended a number of world championships and two Olympic Games (1972, 1976).

> I think it was a real surprise. Like the Pan Ams, the Olympics were something that other people got involved with. It wasn't until I got involved and really started to concentrate that it occurred to me that I may be able to develop

> myself in that way. But, I was older; I had a little more time and I had potential. It gave me something to work for. If I worked hard, then maybe I could get there and certainly, the Olympics were the ultimate in competitive sport.
>
> (021:7)

Both quotes illustrate that the pinnacle or summit of athletic performance at the amateur[61] level, are the Olympic Games and that goals became more feasible and realistic with serious training.

The next most common response to the question about Olympic goals was surprising in its content...that several athletes first decided that they wanted to make an Olympic Team and only then cast about for a sport which would be the vehicle.

> I decided I wanted to make the National Team basically. I wanted to go to the Olympics and to do that, I had to be on a National Team. Actually, I asked my high school coach that year if he thought I could make it in (a particular) sport. He said that he didn't think I could do it by 1972 but maybe by 1976. At that time, we had no idea that Canada would get (host) the Olympics in 1976. And, I wanted to actually play (another sport) but my coach (in that sport) was unaware of any development camps at that time. The opportunity opened up first in (another sport), so that's what I pursued. In fact, I remember writing away to both sports to ask them how to get on the Olympic Team. (015:15, 22)

> I knew I couldn't make the Olympics in swimming. That was in 1968 so I looked around for another sport. It took me 8 more years in that next sport. At the beginning, we (my team) were so far from the Games, the target. But as the results improved, I thought my Olympic goal was a good one. (004:28, 59)

> I knew when I was 8 that I was going to the Olympics. My parents asked me what I was going to do and I said I didn't know. I hadn't decided yet. (013:40)

All three athletes appeared able to choose between the Olympic sports. The first athlete chose on the basis of which sport presented the most probable and expedient route to the Olympics. The second was unable to make the National Team in one sport and so, at age 20, she cast about for another sport. The third clearly identified the Olympic goal when still a young girl. Curiously enough, sport experience, rather than age, seems to be critical to this type of goal setting. The above examples illustrate that similar experiences were described by athletes of quite different ages. Although one interpretation might be that age is unimportant in goal setting, another feasible conclusion may be that sport age is more crucial than chronological age to the setting of Olympic goals. .

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[61] This may be called an avocational level; that is, athletes who do not have this as their singular pursuit and who do not "make a living" from it. Vocational athletes would be those who can pursue competitive sport as a singular enterprise and "make a living" from it. Some of the amateur athletes interviewed for this research are also vocational athletes. This redefinition allows athletes to define themselves as avocational or vocational athletes despite the legal restrictions on amateur and professional sport.

It appears that Olympic goals can be set from moments very early in one's sport career. The following responses reinforce this.

> Actually, at the age of 4, I thought I could make the Olympics. All kids have dreams and my big brother had made the 1968 Olympic Team, so I thought about these things. The whole family was into it (the sport). My sister was in the 1972 Olympics and everybody in the family, all 8 of us, made it to the Nationals. So Nationals was not a big thing because everybody in the family had done that. So right from square one, I always thought Olympics.
>
> (024:18)

> I'd become interested in my (Olympic) sport when I was about 8. It was all I did. By 10, I was very committed. I saw a film about competition at the 1960 Rome Olympics and I remember being just so inspired by one of the competitors. He'd been in a car accident just before the competitions and was obviously hurt. He performed just masterfully. It was very dramatic. He was leaning to the left and leaning to the right and just about falling but he managed. I went home and said to my Mother, "Well, I think I've made up my mind and I am going to compete in the Olympics". She said "Fine dear, just keep up your marks at school". Nobody took me seriously. (029:12)

> Everything felt like I was just doing it. I never had any sort of goal about making a team. When I competed in the Canadian Championships in 1968, I didn't know there was a team going to Scotland. It just sort of happened because I won. I loved competing and I always wanted to win and those other things just happened. It was all so exciting. It was after I got back that I wanted to make the Olympic Team. (020:21).

These examples contain many similarities. The first young athlete, already immersed in age-group competition, described a number of role models in her exceptional family and the identification of the Olympic goal as part of her progression through her competitive sport. Similarly, the next young athlete commited first to her sport and then to the Olympic Games. Once she recognized the ultimate in performance possibilities, she fervently adopted the Olympic goal. The 20 year old seemed unaware of her Olympic potential until circumstances bring her into close proximity of the Olympic Games. In each of these descriptions, athletes describe a firm commitment to their sport.

Some athletes reported being carried along by the process of becoming an athlete. Goals, in these cases, are linked more closely with training activity rather than a performance goal. Some sought to repeat Olympic goals. Others chose to attain similar goals but by different routes. This explains how many of the athletes reported being committed to Olympic goals only after having competed in the Olympic Games.

Some athletes recalled experiencing an awakening of personal performance potential:

> The only projection I ever made was in 1976 saying I was going to be in the 1980 Olympics. That was probably made when my focus was most narrow. I felt in 1976 that as a team, we were just beginning. (015:90)

> It was almost a medal boat in 1976. It was amazing to go from not knowing about the Olympics to winning a medal, all in one year. Only in Canada, eh? Yes, hindsight is really amazing. I honestly feel that I'm more nervous about competition now because I know more. I had no idea in 1976 what could go WRONG. I knew from those results that I was going to make a commitment to the 1980 Olympics. School was always first for me, even before my sport but I never told anybody that. I knew in my own mind that it was and I knew I would be in school until 1980 too. It seemed perfect. (005:41-45)

> We could have won a silver but it was so disappointing. At the end, I remember you (the researcher) saying to me at the closing ceremonies "Well, what about 1980?" and I said I didn't know. When you're younger, four years can be a long time. So, I thought, "Maybe Moscow"! I had the feeling that we were just babes in 1976. Listen, we just started. As a person, I could be so much stronger, so much better. Why quit then? We could be so much smarter. I couldn't stop. And then, success breeds success. There is something about a quadrennial, a four year block from Olympiad to Olympiad, too. (016:23-26)

Each of these examples contain the element of unrealized potential. Each of the athletes reported being novices in 1976 and subsequently making a commitment to make the Olympic Games in 1980 and do well in those Games. If anything is to be said for learning from experience, these women present the perfect case for athletes attending more than one Olympic Games in order to attain their performance potential.

For many others, the first Olympic experience seemed to lead to a commitment to repeating this experience although lacking an intense focus on performance improvement. For example, there is the somewhat humourous account of an athlete capitalizing on her new-found resolve to get to Moscow in 1980:

> I remember standing there at the closing ceremonies (1976) and thinking "Four years down the road, I'll be here again" and the next morning, I thought "Let's go for it". I went for a run and fell over. I had four years to prepare but I thought I'd capitalize on my decision. I was jogging that morning and got passed by one of the Canadian walkers {walking event in Track and Field} and so I decided that between that and the fall, I had better take some time off before getting into training for Moscow. (008:63-64)

Second, there is an athlete who liked her experience at the first Games so much, she wanted to race through the next quadrennial:

> I went to Munich in 1972 and that was it. We'd gotten married in 1971 and I thought "Well, I'll just quit". After the Commonwealth Games in 1970, I still didn't even know what the Olympics were. It wasn't until February of 1972 that I realized I wasn't training and racing consistently and my husband said "If you don't train now, later you'll blame me. We got married and you've slowed your training down". So I really tried after that and I made the team. At the closing in Munich, I knew that I wanted to be in Montreal. I wanted to race for four more years. (020:37)

In these examples, the athletes decide to repeat their Olympic experience. The athlete who was named to both the 1976 and 1980 Olympic Teams felt that she succeeded "in spite of the odds". In spite of four years training, the other athlete only managed to perform at exactly the same level in 1976 as she had four years earlier.

In all the previous examples, the athletes discuss their commitment to the Olympic goal. However, the manner of goal development varies. For some, the Olympic goal gradually became meaningful as it became more feasible. For others, the goal itself was selected early but the vehicle for goal attainment (the sport) was identified later. Still others commit to both the sport and the Olympic goal from early in their athletic experiences. Finally, there are those athletes who do not commit to Olympic goals until after they have already been to the Olympic Games. These athletes describe their goals as either "doing better" or simply "making the team" at the next Olympic Games, a quadrennial in time in the future.

However, not all Olympic athletes admit to setting Olympic goals. Some athletes relate the experience of being carried along by circumstances until, by process of elimination, only Olympic performance goals remain.

> I know people whose life long ambition is to make the Olympic Team and I can't say that mine was at the time. It sort of grew on me as it went. I took one year at a time. (012:17)

> The Olympic Games first became some kind of goal when I was in England and told I was on the Team. It was never anything I thought about doing. I remember seeing Abby Hoffman (Track and Field; 1964-1976) come 6th in the 800 metres on T.V. and the media treated her really badly. Why would an athlete want to go into a sport where they were treated like that? And then it left my mind. Really, I wanted to be a dancer. When I realized that I couldn't make it as a dancer, I really didn't set any other goals other than maybe the academic ones. Now, I say to myself, "Yes, I did that (Olympics) and that's okay and it's something that is passed and I am proud of it now and I am worthy of having done that. Just because it wasn't a goal doesn't mean it was any less worthy.(011:11, 106)

> They announced that there would be a National Women's Team. When my name was called, I stood up. It was much later that I realized that it was significant...the Olympics. The Olympics first became a feasible goal for me when we got a coach in 1973. He was just so impressive. I trusted what he did technically. We signed a contract and then he said he was only going to take certain people and it would be really hard. He wanted a 3 or 4 year commitment. You had to literally commit yourself to only the sport and exclude everything else and that meant school and family. (030:6, 26, 32)

In the first quote, the athlete describes herself as different from the others. Her goals were of a shorter term, eventually culminating in an Olympic experience. The next athlete describes herself as not having an Olympic goal at all. Now, a decade after her Olympic races, this athlete struggles with what it means/meant to achieve a pinnacle of performance and still feel unworthy because others wanted it more. The third athlete was named to the National Team before she understood that that was "the major hurdle" for getting to the Olympic Games. Then, she adopted the Olympics as her goal.

What is evident from these athletes is what could be called "the reluctant Olympian" syndrome: athletes who don't adopt the Olympic goal until much later than their peers, until they are firmly into the experience.

Not all athletes respond to the setting of Olympic goals in temporal terms. Already, it has been discovered that some athletes set goals of participating in the Olympic Games for a first or subsequent time while others seek to better their previous Olympic performance by attending another Olympic Games. Since it is important to discover differences as well as similarities, what follows are examples of unusual Olympic goal setting among the 1976 Olympians.

For some athletes, Olympic goals mean Olympic medals, not Olympic participation! The best example of this follows.

> My goals were always layered. I mean my goal wasn't to make it to the Olympics, but it was always directed athletically, so the ultimate was to go and win the Olympic medal. (010:70)

The medal serves as a goal anchor for her performances in a number of different sport activities. In fact, this particular athlete actively pursued two sports at the Olympic level and finally "medalled" in Los Angeles in 1984 in her summer sport. Other athletes reported wanting to "gold-medal" at the Olympics but had been unable to do so.

Goals are not firm or entrenched. Rather, like identity, goals are acquired and maintained and athletes negotiate goal conflicts. In one discussion of Olympic goals, an athlete stated quite straightforwardly, that she was uninterested in attending another Olympic Games if it were to be held behind the iron curtain (Moscow, 1980).

> Preparation was then for Moscow and that didn't appeal to me. I don't know why. Maybe it was the location. I really did not want to go to Moscow. It's not rational. I had lived behind the iron curtain and I just remember thinking "I don't want to do that". The Olympics for 1980 was a big goal but it wasn't my goal and maybe I was thinking "maybe if I can't go to the top, I don't want to go at all". (021:62, 71)

Her decision meant retirement in 1979. However, at the time of her interview, she was in the final stages of preparation for the 1985 World Master's Games. This example illustrates the complexity of Olympic goals.

There are, apparently, other reasons for altering one's Olympic goals. When a goal becomes unachievable, negotiation and contingency plans or goals are apparent. A few athletes discussed changes to their Olympic goals once the "Boycott"[62] was announced. As an example, one athlete who had won a medal in 1976 related the following:

> I felt that at least I'd been to the Games. That had been a goal and I knew what it was all about. It was really exciting. If I'd missed 1976, I probably would have gone on to 1984 because of the Boycott. (031:51)

In this example and in the one just previous, there appears to be an Olympic goal-setting flexibility for some athletes later in their athletic careers. Each of these athletes had already attended one (or more) Olympic Games and was able to alter her goals; i.e.: set relative Olympic goals rather than absolute Olympic goals.

Two final points with regard to the diversity of Olympic goals need to be addressed. First, consider the timing of the goal setting. There were athletes who related incidents where early in their athletic experience they viewed (or heard about) impressive Olympic performances and recall setting Olympic goals "on the spot". There are also numerous mentions of athletes setting Olympic goals for one Games at the closing ceremonies of the previous Games. This indicates the need for analysis of the nature of goal setting and also of the "turning point" or "landmark" characteristic of some of the goals. These goals, sometimes made at a clearly recalled moment in time, start the athletes on a critical path towards the Olympic Games. A "turning point" for athletes apparently can occur at various points in their career; early, middle or late career.

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[62] The Canadian Government announced that no Canadian athletes would be attending the Moscow Olympiad. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the dissertation.

Second, consider the quality of Olympic goals set by athletes. With the exception of the single athlete who did not select an Olympic goal, athletes discussed various kinds of Olympic goals. Generally, those athletes who had attended a prior Olympic Games set specific goals (to participate, to medal or to perform at a higher level). Athletes attending for the first time generally set participation goals (attendance).

Peak Goals

Olympic participation and/or medal winning is for many Olympians not the primary goal. It might be asked "What other goals are possible for an Olympic athlete?" What keeps athletes involved in competitive sport as they experience various levels of the competitive edge but not the winning edge? The athletes in this research reported that many different goals were useful for measuring essential progress and achievement at various levels but almost all of the goals were self-directed rather than team or "other" directed.

This discussion of peak goals provides a broader, more complete view of the diversity of athletes' goals in sport. Peak goals are divided into two sub-sections, medals and less tangible and/or unique goals. Again, they are not exclusive categories. They are intended to broaden the understanding of goal diversity rather than narrowly categorize goal types.

MEDALS

Many athletes relate peak experiences to medals won. Though not exclusive of Olympic medals, these medals were from numerous different competitions, which apparently had unusual meanings for the athletes. It is both the medals and their perceived meaning that is important to this discussion.

First, some athletes sought to win medals. The following three examples are of athletes who medalled at the World Championships and/or the Olympic Games and yet discuss the meaning of winning medals very differently.

> I didn't even do my best time and it was my best event. Physically, I felt really well but I kind of gave up. I didn't have the drive that day. Since I medalled, it doesn't make me different or better. It wasn't and still isn't any big deal. I never start talking about it. When others bring it up, what can I say? It was a great achievement. I'm proud of it but the performance was nothing out of the ordinary for me. It would have been amazing if I hadn't medalled.
> (028:18)

This athlete differentiated between what she called amazing achievements and great achievements. Amazing achievements related to reaching ones' peak, doing one's personal best, or putting together the very best race. Great achievements had to do with the medals and press attention and, interestingly enough, with the expectation of doing well in the race. Since she did not consider herself to have done amazingly well, "nothing out of the ordinary for me", the achievement could only have been a great achievement. Although this may seem to be an exercise in splitting superlatives, there seems to be a major qualitative difference between "great" and "amazing". Her medal was, in her estimation, quite ordinary because it was expected and she had only duplicated previous performances.

The next example illustrates a negativeness with which a medal can be percieved.

> The coach asked how we thought we'd do (at the World's) and we said "if we came fourth, we'd be really happy". She said not to settle for fourth but go for first. That was absolutely wonderful. She believed in us and from then on, we gained a lot of confidence and started to talk about what victory would feel like. We won a bronze that year.. it was a start. (At the World's the following year) there was a long delay at the end of the race. We deserved to win. We kept saying "We won, I know we won" and when they made the announcement that we placed second with only a fraction of space between us and the gold medalists, the air was probably blue around us. We accepted the silver medal. but I said "next time, we are winning." (022:75, 88)

This athlete discussed her goals as they developed over time. Her second place finish at the World Championships would have been a perfectly acceptable goal in the first year (1977), but by 1978, it was no longer reasonable. Thus, despite the great achievement of placing second in world competition, the medal was only a reminder of just how close she had been to the gold. Curiously enough, this athlete was not selected at the Canadian trials the following year and was unable to compete in world competition.

Just as the above example illustrates, athletes who have won a number of medals seemed to develop ever higher medal goals. They set ever-higher goals:

> It's great. I have been able to channel my time and effort and sport has been so good to me for so long. I want to go to the Commonwealth Games in 1986. It's a goal and I'm sure that I want to win that gold medal there. I have got so many silver medals and it's important to me. (028:87)

Here, the athlete wished to continue in her sport until she won a gold medal. She had already been a three-time Olympian and won many medals (most silver, no gold) at world competition. She considered that gold medal as a fitting end or a just reward for all the years of training and competition. Another athlete thought a lot about medals.

> It's true. Success leads you to more and more. It's addicting. I certainly had a goal to get the Olympic medal and I was improving year by year. Oh, we had just started in 1976 and we were so close even then. We could have medalled in 1980! (016:26)

> I was thinking that it would be nice to be third. A bronze medal would be so nice. And I came third. It was unbelievable because 400 metres from the end, I was still a long way behind. I did that last 400 metres faster than I ever had before. I'd done 4:32 in the trials, 4:28 in the heats and 4:19 in the final. The gold medal was 4:18.8. It was a photo finish. If the race was 5 seconds longer, I would have won. I just came out of nowhere. (020:34)

In these two quotes, medals were crucial to the experience. In the first, the medal was the peak goal, drawing the athlete forward towards another Olympic Games. In the second, the medal was proof to an athlete that she was competitive at the international level. In both examples, the medal goals and achievements acted as an impetus to further training and competing by the athlete.

A few athletes were reluctant to discuss their medal winning aspirations with many others.

> In 1976, my dream was that we won a silver and we didn't win a medal. In 1981, I dreamed we were first and we were second. It's not like I'm psychic or anything. It was more of a reflection about how I felt at the time. I wanted a medal and that was coming through in my dreams. (026:63).

This athlete discussed her medal goals only with her teammate. Another discussed them with her family and very close friends.

> To them I'd say "I want to win a medal". To myself I'd say "I want to win a gold medal". It was really precious to me even though I never could talk about it to anyone. (024:69)

It is as if the medal goal had to be guarded from public knowledge. By extension, if an athlete then failed to win a medal, she would be able to contain her disappointment privately. Also, as one athlete recalled "if it's shared, I'll never win it". Publically and privately held goals may be a fruitful avenue of research.

Athletes did not always seek medals in each race. A few athletes discussed the need to refrain from maximal competition until the right moment. Thus, there is an element of strategy to winning medals. To win appears to set different expectations for future performances. The following quote illustrates the enormous cost of some of these medal winning achievements and provides insight into why they are not sought at every opportunity.

> You can't always peak though. In 1974, I raced so hard that I almost blacked out. I felt awful, but at 14, it scared me to hurt like that. I had difficulties breathing and things were moving all around me. I was rushed over to get my medal...but in all honesty, it took me until the Olympics to dig that deep again. You can't do it regularly. You really have to want to win that Olympic medal to dig, too. (024:35)

The athlete associated her medal peak with both pain and her sense of maximizing herself absolutely.

How differently the two athletes at the World Master's Games identified their medal goals. The meaning of the medals to both athletes is dependent on their purposes as athletes and on why and with whom they are sharing the meaning. In the interview context, they were describing the meaning of their medals to a co-competitor (the researcher) who also won medals in the same events. One athlete was interviewed immediately after placing sixth in a race in which the other won a bronze medal.

> Before, when I used to compete, it was to win. And now, at these World Masters, you have to put in your mind it's for participation. Otherwise, you might get frustrated. Really though, I want to win a gold medal in that race tomorrow. (025:12)

The athlete acknowledged changes in her sense of achievement and clearly identified her desire to win the medal. The other athlete responded quite differently. She had just won a bronze medal and still had two races remaining.

> When I saw the competition, I didn't think I would be able to get a medal. But it's gorgeous isn't it (holding up her medal). I won this all by myself. I set the goals, I trained and I suceeded. When I won at the World's (the World Championships in 1979), the team split up afterwards. This one here, I won by myself - and I feel complete. (025:10)

Both the Master's Games athletes had previously left high performance competitive sport and yet, at the Master's Games, they were again competing internationally in their Olympic sport [63]. These two athletes described changes to their former approaches to international competition. Each regarded competition in a new light; incorporating different levels of acceptable ability and the more personalized meaning of achievement.

Thus, from the discussion on medals as peak goals, a great diversity of meanings become evident. Athletes recounted differences between amazing accomplishments and "merely" great accomplishments in light of how exceptional or how ordinary the medals performances were. Also, the expectation of achieving higher performances than actually accomplished is described as tarnishing the value of medals won of a lesser rank. So too, athletes discuss the value of a gold medal as a peak goal in light of past medal winning performances, i.e.: if a silver medal has been won previously, improvement is indicated by winning the gold. A lesser medal appears to have a somewhat negative value in this context. These examples point to the importance of the history of an athlete's achievements for informing researchers of medals as peak goals and as extenders of athletes careers.

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[63] I too competed at the Master's Games. However, I first raced in marathon canoeing, the sport in which I began competing only after I had finished my olympic sport, rowing. At the time of the interviews with the two athletes, we were co-competitors in some events.

LESS TANGIBLE UNIQUE GOALS

Athletes often set goals that had little to do with Olympic Games or medals. Three different goal forms are introduced in this section; making a representative team, the perfect race and clarity of purpose. Although this does not exhaust the peak goals area, it is considered sufficiently illuminating to the purposes of this chapter.

Making a Representative Team

First, making a representative team (a team which competes internationally) was the most frequently reported of the three less tangible and/or unique goals. This goal could stem from very early in the athletic career, eg. being selected to a school team or to a provincial team. It could also be set and reset later in the athletic career. For example, an athlete who discussed parallel goals in terms of her particular career level; one being a major Games to be hosted in Canada, the other being a commitment to help the team through a set period of time.

> We were host country. So I thought, well, to qualify would be a good intermediate goal. It's not as good as a medal but it's a start. I had made a commitment to come back and help the team for five years. Those five years are up now. (012:76, 79)

In order to win international medals, the normal route was to first be named to a representative team. Extending this, selection may have been a minor goal for athletes who reported their peak goals as winning medals.

Second, an interesting combination of goals is illustrated by the following.

> I was basically anorexic, but I didn't know it. I was at the point where I thought I was fat and I weighed 96 pounds. I went to the MOGAP (anthropological studies) study and I said I was going to be the lightest and, pound for pound, the strongest athlete. My coach would always say I was too fat. In 1970, I raced at 104 pounds, in 1972 at 101 pounds and in 1976 at 95 pounds and going down....I wanted to be a great athlete but it's really fleeting. I like fame only in my own circle. It's the inner satisfaction that's

> important. (020:42, 62)

This athlete had two quite tangible goals, a goal of being the lightest and strongest and the other, fame. Although they are unique, the reflect what the athlete referred to as the intensity of the desire to do the best possible. She recalled afterward that fame had been fleeting and her extremely light weight hindered her performance.

There are certainly more diverse goals than the "less tangible" examples have illustrated. Further, it is somewhat artificial to discuss peaks without some reference to achievement of these goals. The following is a rather free-flowing examination of first of goals linking with potential or optimal performance and second, with goals which are unique. Combined, these exhaust the reported goals of the high performance athletes.

Potential or Optimal Performance Goals

Peak goals within a range of goals[44] that are linked to potential or optimal performances have a descriptive quality rather than quantity about them. As one athlete recalled

> It was vitally important to me to somehow achieve something, not by somebody else's standards but to maximize or peak, to know that I had done the best I could. That sounds really naive but that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be better than I was now because I knew I could work harder and put more things together, to put together a better race. Always at the end of a race you feel like "Geez, if I'd done that...!" It seems insignificant now, but when you're in it, it's something quite different. (001)

The goals expresses are to put skill, ability, desire, luck, etc. into the beginning, duration and finish of a particular competition. In this case, the optimal race is the perfect race. Later in the same interview, the athlete described her final race.

> It was during my last race ever and I felt really in touch somehow. Everything was in relief somehow, every stroke of the race, the color of my boat, the weather conditions that day, everything. When I got to the end of the race, I really couldn't tell whether I actually won or hadn't won. What I'd prepared for what seemed like years was there. I leaned back and put my hand back just as I always did to recover and I knew I would never have to go through that again. It is a very clear moment in my mind. I did it. A short time later I found that I won the race. I still shiver to think about it. (001)

Winning was important but the experience of the final perfect race was overpowering!

Thematically, the perfect or optimal competition goal was echoed in a number of other accounts. One athlete recalled that her perfect competiton was when she was only sixteen years of age.

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[44] Goals within a range of goals can be thought of as mountain peaks in a range of mountains connected to each other by high ground.

> It was the only time that I felt I did the absolute best I could have done at the time. That was the ultimate. There are other times when I did better than I had before but I never felt like I did in that race. For one thing, it was so easy. In the heats, I was already two seconds ahead of my best time without even trying. We had done some visualization work earlier and this day, I decided to do it with a stop watch. So, I did right from the gun at the beginning, through every motion I made, seeing everything until the end. I timed it in 4:50. That was five seconds better than I had ever done before. I had been afraid to use the watch in case I went slower! In my visualization, I even knew there would be a false start. It all felt unreal and strange.
>
> Anyways, there was one competitor who was always ahead of me, from beginning to end. She was never really in the picture at all. Then, there was another Canadian in the race and she started moving closer to me. I concentrated so hard. I was not going to let her pass me. I just concentrated and that is what happened. I came second in that race...I went under the world record. It was fantastic. (017:78 - 88)

This athlete continued to swim for another five years and never again reached a similar peak experience.

Clarity of Purpose

Clarity of purpose is the common denominator in the following accounts.

> There were large stretches of time where I played as an athlete where I really had no goals. I didn't know what the goals would be. But during practices and games, there were a few times when "the light would come on" and I knew I was understanding something essential about playing. (027:69)

> I was acutely aware, I think on some level, although I'm not sure just how consciously, one of the real tests of being a competitor is as they are counting you down 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1. It's that moment when you are totally thrown back on yourself in such an immediate way that it just takes your breath away. It's not even the competition. It's just the amazing part of competition that just crystallizes at that moment. (029:82, 96)

In the first example, the athlete reports that for her, the peak was when "the lights went on". In the second example, the peak is described as that moment of "crystallizing", those moments of total self dependency.

Three final quotes illustrate some of the diversity of clarity of purpose goals. First, an athlete described how she "competed for Dad", his approval being worth more than the medals won or the pain endured.

> You can take yourself to a certain point of pain for yourself and for the glorious medals. Medals never seemed to mean that much to me. They were always bits of metal in a shoebox that you throw in a drawer or in your closet. In 1976, I took myself into that pain again. It meant a lot more. I had to do it for my Dad. Just seeing him smile had meant so much to me when I was younger and then, suddenly, he was dying. I wanted to quit because he was so sick but he told me "You were four years old when you decided to make it to the Olympics and I don't think you should give up on it. So basically it's your decision but you might regret it if you give up on it now." So I went back to training and I geared my performance before the Olympics and at the

> Olympics for my Dad. I hoped he would live through the Olympics so he could watch us. (024:27-35)

In this poignant expression of goals, an athlete described "taking myself into that pain again" in order to please her father one last time. The fact that she ultimately medalled at the Olympic Games seems quite insignificant when juxtaposed with such a unique goal[65].

The second example is descriptive of a unique goal that was "always higher, always better".

> I'd like to go forward and achieve what I am capable of doing. I have to achieve something, that satisfaction or peace of mind at being able to do something better than mediocre. Mediocrity is comfortable but success is also comfortable and I don't like halfway in between. It's an uncomfortable place to be. (008:75)

In this instance, the goals of escaping discomfort and achieving one's capacity go hand in hand. This particular athlete attended two Olympic Games as a competitor and, most recently, made a comeback in her sport and attended the World Master's Games (1985). The "always higher, always better" goal becomes more difficult to define for athletes such as this one. She is still an international competitor, yet describes herself as retired from high performance sport.

The third athlete's goals were related only superficially to mediocrity.

> (Making the team was) very important then. I would have been very devastated if I didn't make it. Even though I didn't give up other things and I really didn't make it to "number 1", I still really hoped I'd make it. It wasn't "Hey, this is fun". I badly wanted to make it. Training was hell in those last two years though. The only thing that kept me going was I thought, if I quit, a lot of people would be disappointed. It would have been a lot like "Didn't you think you could make it?"; "Are you quitting because you're afraid you can't make it?". I didn't want that. I wanted to prove to myself that I could make it. That was my goal. By the time I was selected, I felt sure, I'd made my goal but I didn't feel I was performing at 100%. I simply wasn't happy with it". (013:43, 48, 77)

The athlete wanted to make the team (even though the experience was hell) because she was afraid to quit. The push/pull dynamic here also portrays vividly the process of goal setting in relation to the sport experience.

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[65] As a postscript to this example, the athlete's father did live long enough to see his daughter perform at the Olympic Games but died very shortly afterwards.

E. CONCLUSION

Athletes who competed internationally for Canada described themselves as occupying a unique position along the fine competitive edge of sport participation. This fine edge was characterized by both athlete and sport system expectations that athletes participate in intensive training and competition and maintain a singular focus. In order to understand when and how retirement occurs, and the meaning of such experiences, it is important to ask "what athletes are retiring from". Clearly, being an athlete is a complex and evolving social phenomenon and has considerable influence on how athletes become "retiring" and later "retired".

As many athletes described the dynamics of their "push and pull" relationship with organized sport, they described their own lives as too diverse, too focussed and too costly. They also reported different meanings for the nature of the sport experiences they left. It becomes very clear that retirement process is a common, though frequently unshared experience. This confirms the importance of athletes' historical and biographical contexts to understanding athletic retirement.

Athletes sought to define themselves as individuals and as participants within the sport system. Identity patterns were formed through which athletes made sense or learned to understand themselves as individuals in a larger sport system. Four patterns emerged from this research, the natural identity (whole and complete), the non-athlete identity (ambivalence toward the term athlete), the separated identity (over-development as an athlete accompanied by a sense of incompleteness outside of sport) and the one-sided identity (one-sided development as an athlete but accompanied by a sense of completeness).

This study has focused on athletes' definitions of themselves and their retirement experiences rather than on a social identity. Following Goffman's (1963) lead, the discussion of identity in relation to retirement experience needs to include how athletes acquire and maintain their identities and how they negotiate identity conflicts and devaluations. Clearly, athlete identity, as it evolves through and beyond the high performance sport experience, is an important aspect of how athletes experience the process of retirement.

Finally, two broad categories of high performance goals were explored in this chapter. The first category, Olympic goals, illustrated that a wide variety of Olympic goals were possible and that they could be set and reset over time. Goals were developed from the abstract or less feasible to the concrete or more probable over time. Olympic goals can be identified as means goals ("I like competing in high performance sport") or the ends goals ("I'm going to the Olympics. I just have to find a sport"). Athletes set Olympic goals at various times in their careers, early, late and even after their first Olympic competitions. This time factor appears related to commitment to the Olympic goal via a particular sport versus commitment to progress within a sport. There is also evidence of the existence of a *reluctant Olympian*, athletes who set Olympic goals after the fact.

The second category was called peak goals. These goals reflected a recognition by athletes that attending the Olympic Games by winning all along the fine edge of competitive sport was almost impossible, nor particularly desirable. Athletic goals affect how athletes perceive their retirement experiences. The nature of these goals, their possible or actual achievement and even the barriers to their achievement affect the momentum of athletes' careers and therefore, the meaning of retirement.

Overall, goals are acquired and maintained by the athletes throughout their competitive careers. Often, the goals had individual meanings unique from that of other athlete's goals. The rhythm of sport organization contributed to the formation, timing and achievement of goals. Goals were boundaries or limits of achievement which individuals expected or attempted to carry out successfully while they were competitive athletes. Goal alterations by situational and personal considerations proved important to the rate and quality of athletes' retirement experiences.

It is clear that athletes' perceptions of their sport experiences influence their accounts of high performance sport retirement. Further, since data collection occurred when the majority of the athletes were sufficiently removed from high performance sport to reflect back on the nature of their experiences, the athletes' common sense understanding of those experiences over time is evident. It is therefore logical to presume that how those athletes subsequently left high performance sport must have been somewhat coloured by their perceptions of what they were leaving. It is also logical to conclude that the time of reflection upon sport and retirement experiences changes those reflections and therefore alters the nature of the accounts. In this way, the time of data collection influences the characteristics of the data collected.

VIII. CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

A. INTRODUCTION

The research question for this study is "how and under what conditions do female athletes leave high performance sport?". This chapter attempts to name the process of leaving and describe how it is experienced. That is, this chapter attempts to make theoretical sense out of the descriptive data on sport retirement.

From the previous chapters, it is evident that athletes have, although they do not share, relatively common experiences as they left high performance sport invovlements. It is also evident that there is considerable diversity or individual differences in how athletes progressed through those experiences. On a more abstract level, (a) athletes experienced a transition from being high performance athletes to being less active individuals, (b) the process of leaving is regularized and can be characterized by commonalities in spite of the fact that there are important differences and (c) the process of leaving is prescriptive and therefore, all high performance athletes learn that one must eventually experience leaving. Further, the leaving experiences are partly determined by the sport structure (Chapter Three) and partly by athletes' struggles to make sense of their leaving experiences (Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven).

The descriptive materials of the earlier chapters are represented diagramatically in Figure 1. Superimposed on the figure is a more general concept of a retirement path.

B. THE PATH OF RETIREMENT

The Retirement Path

The path of athletic retirement is a pattern consisting of the awareness of leaving, the pre-leaving interval, the act of leaving and the aftermath. Not all athletes experience all segments of the path and not all parts are experienced sequentially. Each path segment is described by definable characteristics[66].

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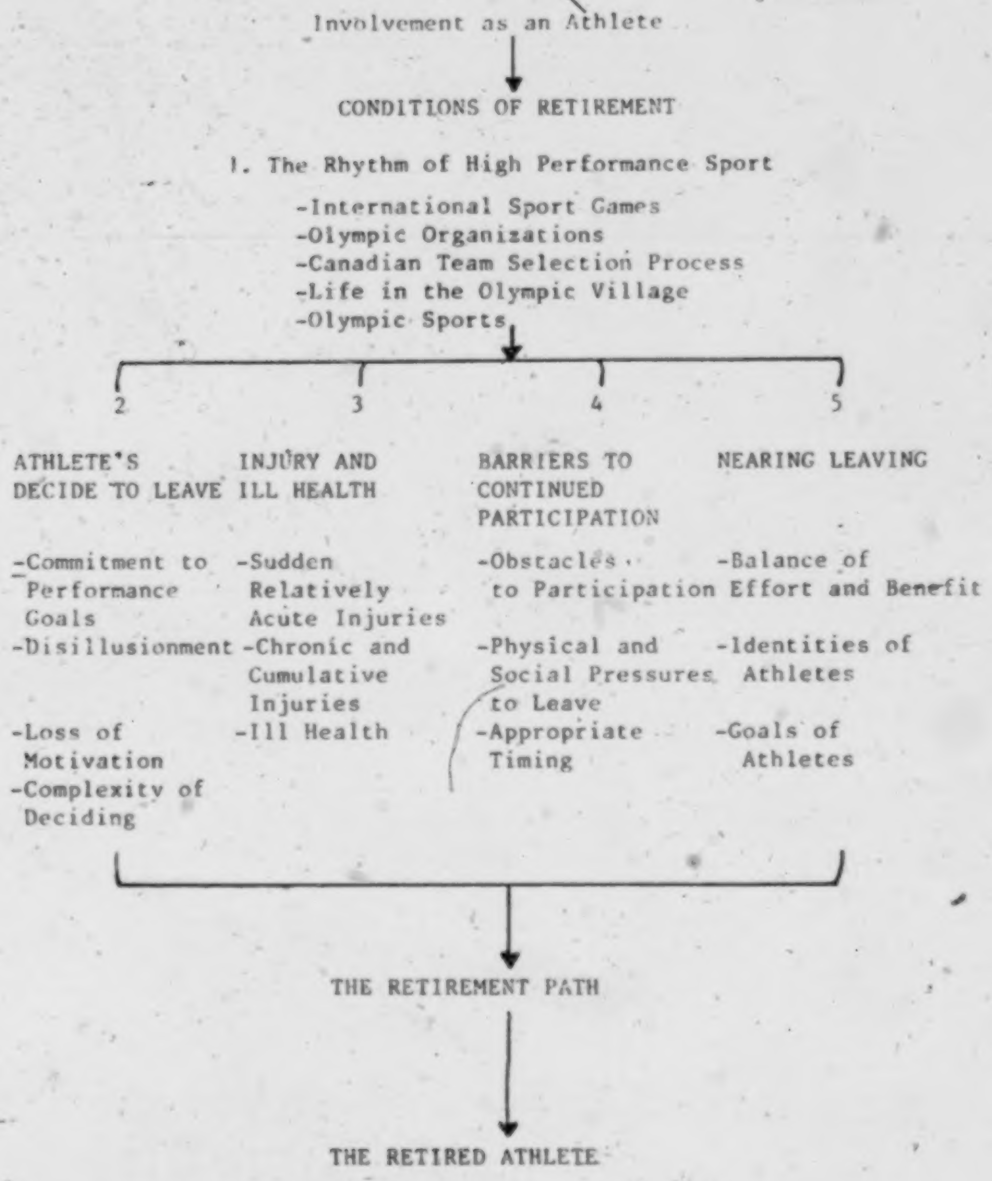
[66] All information in this section comes directly from the interviews with the athletes.

FIGURE 1

ATHLETIC PATH AND RETIREMENT


Involvement as an Athlete
CONDITIONS OF RETIREMENT
1. The Rhythm of High Performance Sport
-International Sport Games
-Olympic Organizations
-Canadian Team Selection Process
-Life in the Olympic Village
-Olympic Sports
2
3
4
5
ATHLETE'S DECIDE TO LEAVE
-Commitment to Performance Goals
-Disillusionment
-Loss of Motivation
-Complexity of Deciding
INJURY AND ILL HEALTH
-Sudden Relatively Acute Injuries
-Chronic and Cumulative Injuries
-Ill Health
BARRIERS TO CONTINUED PARTICIPATION
-Obstacles to Participation
-Physical and Social Pressures to Leave
-Appropriate Timing
NEARING LEAVING
-Balance of Effort and Benefit
-Identities of Athletes
-Goals of Athletes
THE RETIREMENT PATH
THE RETIRED ATHLETE

Awareness of Retirement

Awareness of Retirement was generally the first component of the retirement path. That is, it usually, though not always, occurred before the pre-leaving interval component and almost always before or simultaneous with the act of leaving component. Characteristics which define the decision-making component[67] are the following.

> 1. Decision-making about retirement usually occurred over an extended period of time.

Few athletes recalled a turning point or moment of awareness where they made a decision to leave high performance sport. Instead, those who did make decisions described a more gradual experience of arriving at an understanding over time about when and how retirement might occur.

> 2. Decision-making about retirement was considered to be separate from the act of leaving.

The athletes reported the decisions they were able to make regarding leaving were generally about the timing and the circumstances of retirement rather than about whether it would occur. Only in very specific conditions or circumstances (serious injury, forced retirement) was decision-making described as being proximate to or simultaneous with actual leaving.

> 3. The decision about retirement was accompanied by considerable ambivalence on the part of some athletes.

This reflects the difficulty of making retirement decisions. Often, decisions were altered or reconsidered before the actual leaving occurred. Some athletes described a path of decision-making which included a time and condition for retiring and then simply followed through with the plan. Others recalled a time of constant negotiation of the retirement plan with particular consideration given to athletic goals and changing commitments.

> 4. Awareness of an athlete's retirement was often controlled by others rather than the athlete affected by the decision.

In several instances, athletes recalled being asked to retire (cuts, selections) or told to retire (for 'just cause') by coaches or representatives of the respective sport governing association. Such decisions were made known through an element of coercion whereby the withdrawal of essential resources (funding, coaching, opportunity to compete) prevented athletes from continuing and therefore initiated the retirement act. Such decision-making cannot accurately be considered as an absence of decision-making by athletes, the point is rather that the responsibility for such decisions was presumed by others.

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[67] These characteristics are not presumed to be sufficient and necessary conditions to fully define the decision-making component. Rather, they are the results of initial and exploratory research and must be considered in that light.

5. Events or circumstances were often regarded as initiators of the decision-making process.

Many examples of events or circumstances as initiators of the decision-making process about retirement were found in the interviews. For example, when injury and/or illness occurred, athletes uniformly reconsidered their potential goal-achievements and made decisions about the probabilities of athletic career length. All interviewed athletes who reported injuries and/or illness also recalled deciding to recover first, then compete in the next major competition and only then retire. That is, all decided to *get back on track* first, then retire. The decision-making was influenced by several factors: the perceived seriousness of the injury and/or illness, the proximity of the injury and/or illness to the next major competition and the career momentum at the time. Finally, the cumulative effect of a number of injuries and/or illnesses and changing attitudes about goals and abilities continued to affect the decision-making process.

Awareness of leaving high performance sport functioned in a number of ways. The most important of these was to enable the athlete to actually think about the meaning of leaving, to define the future probabilities about how and under what conditions leaving would occur and to create a certain readiness to leave based upon the nature of the decisions made.

The Pre-leaving Interval

The pre-leaving interval was most often reported as the second segment. It generally developed concurrent with or subsequent to the decision-making segment about retirement. Athletes who had given considerable thought to retirement but had not yet made decisions about leaving were exceptions to this sequencing. The pre-leaving interval, however brief, was described as an opportunity for athletes to make adjustments to their sport participation and also, to come to some understanding about the personal meaning of leaving.

First, the pre-leaving interval was a time of change for the athletes. If the interval was traversed rapidly, fewer changes were reported. If the interval was longer, up to even two years in length, athletes reported considering many of the following changes: activity involvement levels, goal reconsideration, planning for post-retirement, disclosure, timing consideration, consideration of alternatives, identity congruencies and a gathering of occupational and personal resources. If no interval time was available (eg. an athlete cut from the National Team without warning), the changes that the athletes might have considered in the buffer time before retirement had to be accomplished in the aftermath. Those athletes reported having greater difficulty with adaptations to leaving than did those athletes with a longer pre-leaving interval.

Second, the athletes recalled trying to make sense out of leaving. From their responses, the meaning of leaving has been characterized in the following manner.

> 1. Retirement was described as a dynamic and ongoing process in which the athletes experienced varying degrees of control.

There was only one example of an athlete who regarded retirement as simply or exclusively the moment of her last international competition. The remainder considered their last competition to be part of a number of experiences and decisions made over time which culminated in a reduction in involvement at the high performance level of sport.

> 2. The meaning of retirement was seen by some athletes as individualistic and as changing over time.

As one athlete reported, she felt differently about her leaving at different points in her passage through the experience. Her fluctuations are reflected in her statements: "I haven't retired", "that come-back means...", "Retirement is totally getting out of what you've been working at for so long and going on...", and "I suppose I have retired as an athlete but I haven't because I am always going to be physical". The redefinitions occured as her levels of involvement altered. The athlete had a number of reasons for being reluctant to consider herself retired (unrealized goals, negative conception of retirement, self image as an athlete) and successfully managed to avoid that status by expanding the definition.

Many athletes recalled that retirement was something they had experienced not once, but many times. Some left one sport and began another. Some left their Olympic sport but later returned and retired a second or even third time. Other athletes who took time outs or rests for a year or more, did not consider themselves retired, while others did. Clearly, individual athletes had different conceptions about the meaning of retirement.

A number of athletes reported that "if only" the circumstances had been right, they would have been able to make a successful come-back. From this, the meaning of retirement can be further expanded to include the following points:

3. Retirement had little perceived relation to actual athletic skills and abilities.

4. Retirement status or the retirement event was generally regarded as reversible or impermanent.

There was a noticeable absence of references to personal declining ability as a characteristic of retirement. It would seem that either the actual declines were not perceived to initiate retirement or athletes were reluctant to discuss such declines. Regarding retirement status, many athletes recalled situations where they had time away from high performance sport training and/or competition but did not regard them as retirement unless their intent was to leave for a substantial length of time. It is unknown, as yet, what a substantial length of time might be. However, it was clear that the retirement event (or act of leaving) was inclusive of potential come-backs or call-backs.

The meaning of retirement was also reported as:

5. The absence of opportunity to compete at the high performance level.

When *sport leaves the athlete*, the retirement experience is due to the absence of further opportunity to compete. Many athletes who left after experiencing obstacles to participation also reported retirement in the same manner.

Finally, some athletes defined leaving as an expected event or experience simply by virtue of the rotational nature of team memberships.

6. Retirement is an expected experience which ensures that older athletes move on to make room for younger, developing athletes.

In this definition, the ongoing cycle of sport participation is evident. Athletes who recognized their participation to be part of the natural rhythm of sport, expected to retire at an appropriate time. Such a definition reflects athletes' beliefs about the essential continuation of the sport system as perhaps more important than individual experiences in that system.

The pre-leaving segment of the retirement path is characterized both as a period of active change (adaptation) by the athletes and by a conceptualization of the meaning of retirement to individual athletes. The length of the interval seems critical to the degree of adaptation and understanding athletes can accomplish. The segment of the retirement path clearly identifies the importance of time lags between awareness of leaving and the act of leaving as preparatory for retiring athletes.

The Act of Leaving

Third, *the act of leaving* proved to be a complex component of the retirement path to define.

1. The act of leaving was separate from decision-making about leaving. Athletes who perceived themselves to be in control recalled making decisions about leaving as much as two years in advance. Other athletes, those with little perceived control, were still able to identify a time-lag between any notice or warning about impending leaving and an act of leaving. For example, many of the athletes who experienced injuries but subsequently returned to competition generally acknowledged that they had known that "the days were numbered". Athletes receiving no warning about leaving, i.e.: those suddenly cut from teams or forced to retire, were unable to discuss decision-making in relation to the act of leaving. Rather, they experienced absolute lack of choice.

Leaving experiences such as time-outs, recovery periods, time-offs, compatible sport training (in other sports) and reduced involvement levels were generally not described as sport retirement. However, some athletes reported that they were able to control the act of retiring so that they, in fact, retired from one of the above leaving experiences. This introduces the following point.

2. Many different experiences, including leaving various degrees of involvement were considered as possible retirements.

One athlete recalled retiring from a come-back attempt. Another recalled her retirement from a time-out after a strenuous competitive season. Another reported that she just "faded-out" of the sport scene and didn't realize until later that she had effectively retired. Still another athlete indicated that her actual retirement, that is, her mental retirement, occurred one full season before her physical retirement.

Many of these athletes were unable to identify a retirement act but could identify an absence or reduction in involvement. This they called retirement. This introduces the point that

> 3. The act of leaving was generally not marked in any special way or by any special event or ceremony.

Usually, the time of retirement was not marked by any event. Only one athlete reported receiving a gift for retiring. Two others recalled attending "retirement parties" at the end of a season but viewed them as season wrap-ups rather than as special event marking retirement.

Many athletes did not consider the act of leaving as a one-time event. Several athletes reported leaving more than one sport while others reported leaving the same sport more than once.

> 4. The act of leaving could occur more than once and was considered as permanent by some athletes but impermanent by others.

For example, one young athlete was retired from skiing, then knew what to avoid in her subsequent retirement from rowing. It is logical to assume that athletes with such multiple retirement experiences clearly had more opportunity to learn to "do it right" but few reported that their multiple retirement experiences were the same. This diversity of leaving experiences, even those experienced by a single athlete, highlights the difficulties in identifying just what constitutes the act of retirement.

Finally, most athletes recalled that they experienced the act of retirement alone or in isolated circumstances. Even with considerable time between decision-making and the act of retiring, few athletes disclosed their reitrement plans to others. Those who experienced barriers to continued participation found that their contact with other athletes immediately after retirement was limited. Generally, recently retired athletes left the sport situation and returned to family homes and non-sport environments for a period of time and managed their retirement in isolation from sporting personnel.

The act of leaving can be described as a relatively impermanent (even temporary) status and/or event generally preceeded by decision-making and characterized by variable leaving patterns. The act of leaving was usually a reduced involvement or absence of competitive involvement in the competitive sport world that was normally experienced alone and in isolation by particular athletes.

The Aftermath

Aftermath is the final component of the retirement trajectory or leaving path considered in this research. Athletes variously referred to the aftermath as the fallout, the climb down, detraining time, post-retirement and the post-competition void. The characterisitics of this segment are discussed below.

1. Ambivalence about the retirement experience was carried over into the aftermath.

A majority of the athletes who considered themselves retired talked freely about their dream of a come-back; their plan to return and compete again. Many also reported they wished they could return to being an athlete the first time and negotiate the original passage through retirement differently. Hindsight, they knew, is always 20/20 and they thought that an opportunity to repeat the retirement might improve the experience. The discontent with the experience was most evident among athletes who perceived they had had little control over leaving. These athletes continued to feel loss, distrust, mistrust, devastation, disillusionment, a sense of unfinished business or a lack of fruition for their previous athletic efforts.

2. Negative regard for leaving and/or personal retirement status was evident among some athletes.

A number of athletes had been bystanders at the retirement of co-competitiors and they had learned that retirement could "go badly". As a result of such experiences, they anticipated their own retirement to be somewhat difficult, and in the way of self-fulfilling prophesy, it was. Others experienced a reluctant retirement, deciding to leave but finding themselves addicted to the sport. For them, the act of leaving was inordinately more difficult than expected. For many of these athletes, retirement was perceived as a reduced or lesser status. Collectively, these perceptions contributed to more general negative perceptions about retirement. Since the meaning of retirement was apparently derived from personal or reported experiences of athletes in retirement situations, a negative regard for retirement is an important factor in the development of retirement meaning among the athletes.

3. Attempts at reinvolvement were impeded by a number of factors, principally by athletes' lack of confidence in their physical capabilities.

While few athletes admitted to declining abilities while they were pre-leaving, they were able to identify physical inability as a potential hindrance to a return to competition. It may be that as athletes, it was taboo[41] to discuss declining abilities, while as retired athletes, it became acceptable. The basic uncertainty of the how and when of retirement is generally not a topic of conversation among the active athletes. Although retirement, as an eventuality is "a fact of sport life", it was a taboo topic among the active athletes. It was more freely discussed after retirement had occurred. More research into this particular relationship is needed. Other obstacles to re-involvement attempts were identified as "lack of fire", "lack of optimal opportunities" or lack of confidence that the body would be able to handle the stress. Some athletes were called-back by their sport governing associations. Others were able to affect come-backs as athletes. Still others became re-involved in Master's level competition (eg. the World Master's Games) or altered their involvement to recreational or less competitive levels. Some athletes did not return in physically active ways but chose coaching, administration, officiating, refereeing and/or other forms of volunteer work.

Internalized understanding of sport age in relation to declining physical ability was evident in many of the athletes' accounts. The Master's level athletes were quite candid about their changing perceptions of oldness, sport age and performance ability. They all discussed their surprise at how quickly their former athletic skills had returned and at how well they were able to perform. Their participation at the Master's level of competition apparently functioned both to bring them back to competitive fitness and to reduce their sense of oldness and inability to perform.

Since this study was conducted less than a decade after all of these athletes competed at the international level, the long term physical effects of some of their experiences are unknown. However, some athletes were already able to identify the legacy of physical problems they carried into the aftermath.

> 4. Aftermath sometimes involved the management of longstanding effects from sport injuries or illness.

As earlier indicated, several athletes recalled that they had earlier risked long term problems for short term goal achievements. The aftermath of retirement, for some of these athletes, was characterized by a large component of "old athletic injury"[69] management.

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[41] A taboo in this instance, is the avoidance or prohibition of the topic of retirement. Such avoidance or prohibition is a product of social custom, influence and authority in the sport subculture.

The 1980 Olympic Boycott was perhaps the most vivid example of a common point at which athletes recognized that the cycle of sport would go forward despite their personal absence.

> 5. The cycle of competitive sport continued despite the retirement experiences of individual athletes.

That is, the Boycott caused a number of athletes to reconsider their place within competitive sport and thereby recognize their essential expendability to international sport. That fact certainly added a shade of meaning to their retirement experiences which they previously had not recognized.

In sum, the aftermath generally is characterized by the continuation of athletes' attitudes at the time of retirement. That is, if ambivalence and a negative regard for retirement status were present during the earlier segments of the retirement path, they were also likely to be represented in the aftermath. Lack of reinvolvement confidence was evident for those who aspired to make a physically competitive form of come-back. Other non-physical types of re-involvement were well represented. Injury and/or health problems which occurred during competitive involvements led some athletes into an aftermath complete with the management of the long term effects of those problems. Finally, some athletes were able to identify their own essential expendability to the ongoing cycle of organized competitive sport.

The Retirement Path Evaluated

The retirement path has been identified as consisting of four component parts generally occurring sequentially in the high performance athletic career. From the earlier chapters, conditions of retirement were identified by the athletes. At this point in the analysis, new conditions can be identified from the retirement path. For example, not all athletes experienced the retirement path in that manner. Some athletes did not experience the path in a sequential order or "skipped past" entire segments. Some recalled having little or no choice over the timing or the conditions of their retirement. Others reported "being retired" and experiencing no pre-retirement interval. The example illustrates that the retirement path is not experienced in a linear fashion by all athletes, but may be reversible and repeatable in addition to being inevitable. Also, athletes struggled to be active and to control leaving as best they could. This illustrates that various degrees of perceived control over retirement are possible and that such control is variously extended over the meaning (*what*) and timing (*when*) of retirement and of how retirement is experienced.

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[69] Injury management included such problems as reconstructed joints, disk problems in the back, shoulders prone to dislocation, ankles prone to sprains, dietary problems and even psychological management problems.

There is a clear dynamic between the sport structure and the retirement experiences of the athletes. The structure of sport was not a major part of the reporting by the athletes. That is, the structure of sport was abstract and nebulous and, as such, was poorly understood by the athletes. The structure of sport was a powerful, unnamed and invisible influence on the retirement of the athletes. The athletes reported their retirement experiences in a way that "made sense" to them. Their stories emerged and altered over time. That is, the manner in which the athletes understood their retirement experiences changed over time and thus, the commonsense understanding of retirement is also dynamic. Therefore, there is a dynamic in the way sport is "made sense of" by the athletes and another dynamic in the cycle of sport that produces potential retirement experiences.

From these dynamics, it is possible to identify elements of structure and of experience as component parts of the retirement path. Both elements are essential to the explanation of how and under what conditions retirement occurs. Also, it is through an evaluation of the structural and experiential elements that a further level of abstraction and clearer naming of the process of retirement is provided.

C. RECURRENT CONCEPTS OF RETIREMENT

In the discussion of the *Path of Retirement*, a number of concepts recurred. Each is presented here as a sort of window through which the retirement experience can be viewed; as recurrent themes in the research. They are evaluated below in a flexible, dynamic way, drawing upon other theories and consistently linking the phenomena of retirement with the manner in which athletes experience it.

Retirement is Inevitable

Is retirement inevitable for high performance female athletes? A qualified "Yes" is the response. The inevitability of sport retirement can be likened to that of death. Even though all must die, death is not synonymous with the end of being "old". Death also happens to those who are young and middle aged. In sport, retirement may be experienced by young athletes or very old athletes. All athletes eventually retire only in the same sense that everyone dies. That reveals little about how and under what conditions athletes retire.

The pattern of retirement is generally structured by the sport system but in reality, is experienced in many different ways. It is a simple phenomenon and, at the same time, a very complex one. Although the retirement path has been determined, there is no linear development guaranteed. Athletes' experiences are tremendously variable and, as a result, some athletes never consider themselves to be retired. Others retire more than once. Thus, athletes may go in and out of retirement but *it is a status that can not be eluded forever.*

Retirement is Reversible

The retirement process appears to be unidirectional. That is, once athletes enters the path of retirement, it is logical to assume that it is only a matter of time before such a transition is complete. This unidirectionality is supported by the sport structure which encourages the systematic streamlining of athletes into specific involvements and eventual retirement. That is, the structure supports athlete development programs that are focussed and forward moving.

However, not all athletes experienced sport in such a direct and continuous manner. Intermittant involvement including periods of rest, injury recovery, time off, burn outs, come-backs in other sports and retirement can be viewed differently when their meanings are set by the relentless motion of the sport cycle. Thus, although retirement may appear to be systematic, it acquires its experiential description from the meanings that athletes assign to their various involvement levels. In this way, the intentions of the athletes determine whether the retirement transition has been aborted, reversed or completed.

Retirement is Repeatable and Impermanent

The cycle of sport presents athletes with the opportunity to retire in exactly the same way every four years and in similar ways every year; the quadrennial and annual cycles respectively. Although the sport structure at the high performance level does not encourage multiple retirements, many athletes experience more than one retirement. Further, athletes experience sport in non-uniform ways. They have differing entry points, successes, lengths of involvement and disinvolvement and naturally, retirement experiences. They may repeat a retirement experience when the opportunity presents itself. The repetition of the retirement phenomena illustrates that retirements, when they occur, may not be permanent in the context of athletes' overall sport experiences.

Retirement May Be Experienced Alone or in a Group

The cycle of sport provides opportunities to retire and athletes are expected to avail themselves of those opportunities. Since retirement is strongly linked with performance potential, the sport system is generally prepared to limit involvement opportunities when, for example, athletes have exhausted their potential, athletes do not "fit" the future plans or a team loses its institutional support. In many instances, athletes are required to disband as a group. In other instances, athletes are informed individually of their impending retirement. It would appear that retirement may be experienced alone or in a goup.

Athletes experience retirement in many ways. Even when a group of athletes leave at the same time (eg. the Boycott or disbanding of a team), they may experience the entire retirement path in an insular and separate manner, removed from their co-competitors. The simple fact of "retiring and going separate ways" was a common aftermath of leaving.

There is some evidence that athletes experience the act of leaving and the aftermath in isolation from other athletes. This would indicate that a breakdown in social support occurs at least by the time athletes leave; a form of mutual disengagement by ongoing athletes and the retiring athletes. The risk of social isolation before the act of retiring may be one reason why few athletes, in control of their leaving, discussed disclosing their retirement plans to others. A similar disengagement may also be evident afterwards where retired athletes did return to the sport scene as observers and found that what had formerly been familiar was made strange because they were "out of the groove". However, before such disengagement and isolation can be examined, an exploration of the type of social network that athletes experience is essential. The organizing principles of such a network, based upon competition and a "I" liberal ideology, are different from sociological concepts of community. How does the social network of sport respond to the successes of one of its members? How does that social network repond to the retirement of one of its members?

It appears that athletes generally do not regard their retirement experiences as shared experiences. They may experience the awareness of retirement, the pre-leaving interval and the act of leaving with other athletes but the meaning of those experiences varies greatly from athlete to athlete. The aftermath was invariably described as unshared. Thus, despite the many variations in athletes' experiences, even when athletes retire as a group, they experience retirement alone.

Retirement Readiness

Readiness is considered as athletes' planning and preparation for the eventuality of retirement. For some athletes, readiness was an ongoing and changing attention to the leaving process. For others, readiness was a luxury that only other athletes experienced. Thus, not all athletes reported a readiness for leaving. Often, the readiness to retire was related to an awareness of or conscious expectation of leaving and a degree of preparation for leaving.

Athletes' awareness of retirement was controlled, to a large degree by the sport structure. The athletes learned the meaning and timing of retirement through observation and/or modeling of other athletes, deliberate teaching by coaches, and reinforcement by sport personel, media and important others. The sport structure ensured that athletes would understand the finite dimensions of being high performance athletes.

The awareness of leaving was difficult to bring into focus as a concept. Some athletes did discuss a certain readiness to retire as the result of early decision-making about retirement. Others recalled that the "wear and tear" of sport or certain changes to the quality of their sport experiences instigated some awareness of leaving. Changes in personal characteristics such as chronological age, sport age, family situations, performance capabilities and motivation to continue also acted upon athletes' expectations of leaving.

It appears that awareness of retirement was either sudden or gradual for most athletes. If it was a sudden awareness, athletes considered the voluntariness of retirement and possible avenues of resistance. Much more common however, was the gradual form of awareness. Whether awareness was controlled by the sport structure or the athlete and whether retirement awareness was sudden or gradual, the interlocking of the phenonmena of retirement and the way it is experienced are inseparable.

Among the preparations for leaving which athletes made were specific arrangements (trips, school, work, marriage) and/or disclosures of their plans. Further, readiness was enhanced by the conscious development of alternative goals and activities. Some athletes recalled that readiness accelerated the pre-retirement interval so that they experienced the act of retiring sooner than expected. For others, readiness acted as a deccelerator to the retirement process, slowing the rate of athletes' transition as they struggled to resist retirement status. Still others reported that[79] positive career momentum, where athletes were "just beginning to roll" actually delayed their retirement transition. Thus, readiness could be characterized as an athlete's status or regard for the eventuality of retirement which included both the degree of preparation for leaving and the awareness of leaving.

It is possible to conceive of negative experiences in sport as acting on the retirement process through acceleration of athletes' readiness to leave. Conversly, positive sport experiences (continued success, new opportunities etc.) can be regarded as retarders of the rate at which athletes retire.

Timing

The timing of leaving is the arrangement of the timing of the act of leaving so that it coincides with athletes' expectancies or achievements. It is not to be confused with the rate at which athletes progress through their retirement experiences. Rather, it is limited to the arrangements about the timing of retirement that athletes consider important. The timing of retirement can be controlled to varying degrees

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[79] Achievements, goals and opportunities all acted as spurs of positive career momentum.

The sport structure establishes the patterns of membership "turnover" which are most appropriate for developing successful international teams in accordance with the resources and planning procedures of the sport organization. The structure functions on an annual and quadrennial rotation and athlete involvement is prescribed by that rotation. Therefore, the most appropriate time to leave high performance sport is partially dictated by the rhythm of sport and athletes' involvement status.

Athletes are involved in high performance sport on a voluntary basis. They can withdraw membership at almost any time. In this way, athletes presumably could control the timing of retirement if they wished to withdraw. However, the involvement of athletes is a complicated matter. The commitment to continue may vary according to potential performance goals, health, group membership and status identity and activity attraction. Some athletes report strong commitment while others do not. Combined with athletes' recognition that "the timing of retirement has got to be right", athletes may chose a time to retire that is most appropriate.

Other expectancies and/or achievements influence the timing of retirement. Clearly, the athletes learn about the timing of retirement from sport involvement through observation, direct teachings and social reinforcement. Although not all athletes sought to retire "at the right time", most recognized that it was the sort of retirement expected from them. As considerations of timing, athletes also identified the moral dilemma of prolonging the career (lingering, the free ride, hanging on too long), the unfulfillment problem of retiring too soon, the achievement of athletic goals to coincide with the act of leaving, the reconsideration of goals in relation to timing, and the effect of readiness as an accelerator or retarder of the rate of leaving. Athletes were aware of general rather than specific time constraints on their athletic careers.

Unknown conditions of athletic training and competition made accurate plans for the timing of retirement almost impossible. Both athletes and others (eg. coaches, administrators) were direct influences on the timing of athlete retirement. Some athletes recalled considerable time between decision-making and their actual leaving. Others reported warning signals such as injuries or "writing on the wall" which they then considered as points from which to negotiate a more exact leaving time. Still others recalled that it was best to retire at one's optimal performance peak. For them, it was an essential mark of success to be able to retire at the right moment! When others influenced the retirement of athletes, there was frequently no long term awareness for the athletes. Those retirements tended to occur with little warning and minimal degrees of negotiation.

The meaning of timing is different from athlete to athlete. An "off-time" retirement, for example, was considered as one that occurred suddenly, without warning, when athletes were unprepared. Athletes identified these "off-time" retirements usually as being "too early", although sometimes "too-late". "On-time" retirements are generally described as more gradual experiences, where athletes are prepared by virtue of their own planning or expectancies. This may be a form of *anticipatory socialization* (Neugarten, 1979) whereby the length of awareness and a high degree of learning about retirement contribute to athletes' preparations for retirement. It is reasonable to conclude that athletes' sport ages may be part of this anticipatory socialization.

Finally, retirement can occur a number of times. This frequency of retirement experiences must be considered in discussions about how athletes evaluate the meaning of the timing of a particular retirement experience. The "on-time" or "off-time" designation would be greatly altered by one's past retirement experiences.

In sum, when athletes report control over retirement, they often report that it is the *timing* that they control. However, athletes' retirement choices are not made in a vacuum and therefore, the influence of the rhythm of sport and its organizational structure must not be underestimated. Further, although athletes may expect to retire, they reported being unclear about what they would experience, how they would cope with changes and what resources they could mobilize to assist them. Timing is a critical component of athletes' retirement experiences.

Control Over Retirement

Specific control over retirement experiences is a microcosm of the general control over athletes' sport experiences. That control is shared by the sport structure and the participating athletes.

The sport structure controls athletes' retirement in significant through often subtle ways. This control is discussed in relation first to authority and second to systematic control. Athletes accept the authority of the sport structure to control significant portions of their sport involvement. For example, they generally obey those in positions of authority (coaches and administrators). Athletes exchange a degree of personal autonomy for opportunity to participate and access to resources. The system inculcates athletes with the beliefs and attitudes about participation and also, about retirement and athletes are expected to accept the authority of coaches and administrators to make decisions which directly affect the continued participation of the athletes. Athletes are seldom able to "agitate" or resist the system's control over their experiences.

Also apparent is the systematic control over the quadrennial planning, competitive opportunities, financial assistance, team membership, coaching and sport administration. This control enables the system to "clean house", "cut athletes", "force retirements for just cause" and in many other ways, alter the competitive opportunities of athletes. On a more subtle level, the system was also seen as presuming to make decisions for athletes, for changing program focus (eg. from international to developmental athletes) with little notice and for structuring selection processes so that particular athletes would be unsuccessful.

The sport cycle organizes athletes into repetitive involvements which generally move from the general to the specific. That is, in one year, the athletes were trained within a pattern of general fitness, specific fitness and general technical training, specific technical training and competition, high performance peaking and performance and then a post-season rest before beginning the cycle over again. Throughout, the athletes were expected to participate in regular training, testing, practices and competitions. In return, there were various degrees of assistance; coaches, funding, physical monitoring programs, co-competitor association, and primarily, opportunities to compete in Canadian colours. Annual competitive opportunities included regional and national competition, the potential for touring internationally and culminating with the World Championships held annually in each sport. In the four year, quadrennial cycle, different opportunities were presented to the athletes. Athletes were tailored to peak at some (or all) of the Olympic Games, the Commonwealth Games and the Pan American Games.

There is a great degree of structural certainty in the sport cycle. The actual experiences of athletes as they begin, continue and eventually leave high performance sport illustrate that a discrimination between participating and competing at various levels is necessary. General participation is characterized by a cyclical and repetitive sport involvement that is competition-poor and allows for flexibility in athletes' daily lives. As involvement continues, greater acceptance of attitudes and structures of sport would be expected.

However, high performance athletes, those on the *fine competitive edge*, describe a much different form of involvement. The fine edge is characterized as competition-rich, structurally inflexible and routinized. To participate internationally in the Olympic Games, all of the athletes in this study were part of the fine edge of the sport cycle for at least one previous year. As the opportunities for international competition become more select (annual to quadrennial), athletes reported becoming what may be called *competitive specialists*. Athletes report spending maximal time on training routines, thinking about training and competition, travelling and testing. That is, their increased involvement in the activity and their increased commitment also translated into increased social absorption into the sport (Scott, 1982). Various identity formulations occured in an ongoing and dynamic way throughout athletes participation in the sport cycle. Athletes recall accepting the rules and demands of the sport cycle, including its "right" to increasingly control their daily lives as they approach international competition. Evidently, the athletes' cycles of involvement were established by the sport cycle (rather then the reverse).

Intermittant athletic involvement, including rest, injury recovery, time off, burn out and retirement then have differing natures when their meanings are set by the relentless motion of the sport cycle. Retirement, in particular, acquires its systematic meaning from the nature of athlete involvement in the sport cycle. The athletes in this study entered the sport cycle, were streamlined into specific involvements and eventually competed at the international or high performance level. The sport system designed their experiences to be focussed and developmental. For the athletes, the system was routinized, insulating and separating. Many athletes related that they felt themselves different than and separate from other children/women of the same chronological age. Retirement from such an endeavour was both expected and anticipated by the athletes. They had watched athletes retire before them and generally knew that leaving would one day occur.

The athletes' control over retirement is considered as the command or sway athletes have over their retirement. The degree of control and the form of that control must be considered.

Athletes presented themselves as participants in the process of retirement with limited negotiating power (limited degree of control) over how and under what conditions their retirement should occur. They were participants in what can accurately be described as a rhythmical repetitive cycle of organized sport events which relentlessly moves forward. Athletes' possible goals had to coincide with and be tailored by the opportunities regularly presented by the sport system. Retirement was variously affected by such factors as when individuals entered the system, how and under what conditions they developed into high performance athletes, how long they were able to recycle or rejuvenate themselves and remain part of the cycle, how they left the cycle and the possibilities and probabilities for their reinvolvement. The cycle proved durable despite the individual influence of competitive, retiring or retired athletes.

Despite the overwhelming control of the sport system, athletes were variably able to control when they retired (timing), the experience of leaving (how) and the meaning of leaving.

Athletes reported maximal control over the timing of retirement when their decisions were unimpeded by coaches, friends or the sport situation. That is, athletes' control was maximal when they had the freedom, authority and ability to make choices about their athletic lives. Athletes reported lesser control over the time of retirement when changing opportunities or abilities controlled their participation. Still less control was perceived when consideration was given to sport age, chronological age, rules, structural developments and uncertainties which influenced athletes' involvements. It appears that athletes' control over the timing of retirement was related to their commonsense understanding of how retirement should be experienced (role models, learning, socialization), the appropriateness of the timing of their retirement and the recognition of their "on-time" or "off-time" status.

Athletes' were generally unable to control *how* retirement was to be experienced except through a choice to withdraw or through constant negotiation to delay the onset of the retirement process. In cases of injury and/or illness, for example, athletes were able to control their involvement for short periods of time (until the next major competition) before retiring. Other athletes were able to designate how they wanted to retire (at the Olympic Games; with a gold medal) and did so when they accomplished the set conditions. However, in most cases, athletes' reported an inability to control the conditions of their retirement. They reported minimal control over structural obstacles or circumstances and only through their ability to predict and achieve goals were they able to achieve desired retirement conditions.

Athletes are able to best control the meaning of their retirement experiences. Previously discussed is the fact that the meaning of leaving is largely inculcated by the sport structure. Athletes learned through apparently subtle means, that the "best time" to retire involved "doing it right" and "doing it at the right time". Individual differences in involvement cycles (eg. intermittant involvement) were poorly tolerated by the sport system which reserved the right to retire athletes whenever necessary and for whatever reasons. This structural control contributes to what might be called a functional uncertainty on the part of the athletes. That is, their sport involvement was generally a tenuous experience and retirement was thus, only marginally in their control. This explains how athletes who expressed great bitterness and resentment over their lack of control of leaving generally were powerless to do much other than leave.

Not only did the meaning of retirement develop over the length of athletes' involvements in sport, they also altered over the time of the interviews with the athletes. The ongoing re-evaluation of retirement circumstances and understandings of them alters even after the process of retiring is complete.

The ongoing sport involvement of athletes shapes their retirement experiences. For athletes who retired more than once from the same sport or retired once from two or more sports, the overriding view is critical. Just as the path along which an athlete develops into a high performance athlete is generally unique and apparently not the least bit smooth, the path of retirement may also be patterned by intermittant involvement over time. Thus, an athlete may be retiring from such involvements as the Olympic games, a time-out, an illness or an injury event, a rest or reduced involvement or a perfect race. She may also be retiring from a short term involvement of one or two years at the international level, from a long term involvement of perhaps ten to fifteen international competitive years, or from an unsuccessful come-back attempt after a two or three season lay-off. Clearly, this understanding of variable leaving patterns must be incorporated into the more general conceptualization of athlete retirement.

Some athletes referred to a negative regard for retirement. This introduces a concept of retired athletes occupying a devalued status (Matthews, 1979). There is some support for this concept, particularly in light of the manner in which the timing of retirement was negotiated. That is, a negative regard for retirement functioned as a retarder to the rate at which some athletes progressed through the process of leaving. Also, there is some evidence that athletes experience the act of leaving and the aftermath in isolation from other athletes. This would indicate that a breakdown in the community or social support of athletes occurs at least by the time the act of leaving occurs. Some athletes talked about social isolation occurring before the act of leaving, a form of mutual disengagement by ongoing athletes in the system and the retiring athlete but far more were succinct about isolation afterwards [71]. A similar disengagement may be evident afterwards, where retired athletes did return to the sport scene as observers found that what had formerly been very familiar was made strange because they were "out of the groove" and others had taken their place.

Other evidence of a devalued status may be the lack of an event or circumstance to mark the act of retiring by most athletes. The majority of the athletes, with the exception of perhaps the most successful or the longlived, simply leave; fade into the retirement aftermath. When they *return* to regular life, they variously set new goals and participated in new cycles, new relationships and new positions. It seems a *new* existence rather than a *return* to what was previously experienced. Their *new* experiences separate them from the previous sport cycle. In this way, the retired athlete is cloaked in a status that is defined by the unknown and by negative descriptors such as no longer competing, not returning, unable to perform anymore, incapable of keeping pace, or past her prime.

Crises negotiations or smooth passages through retirement experiences influence athletes' commonsense understanding of the meaning of their experiences[72]. Although many athletes report negotiating their involvements and leaving experiences, very few report crisis negotiations after retirement is complete. Apparently, adaptation to retirement partially occurs through expectancy and partially through the pre-leaving interval. Athletes who describe smooth transitions, describe some control over how they negotiate the retirement passage and appear to have minimal (if any) crisis management during the aftermath. Sufficient time to adapt to the emerging understanding of retirement status clearly averts major crises. Athletes report feeling more satisfied with their retirement if they had sufficient time and control to negotiate the changes necessary. Thus, athletes' experiences with the transition from high performance athlete to retired athlete affect the meaning of retirement and that meaning can alter over time.

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[71] The risk or occurrance of social isolation before the act of retiring may be one reason why few athletes, in control of their leaving, discussed disclosing their retirement plans to others.

[72] Sheehy (1976) states that crisis negotiation is the transition from one stage to another in life development.

Control is a major theme in the retirement explanation. Control over athletes' retirement experiences is shared by the structure of sport and the participating athletes. Often the control is part of the function of a large and impersonal system which consistently moves athletes in and out of its programs. Less often, athletes perceive themselves to be in control of a portion of their retirement experiences. They describe being variably able to control the timing, the experience and the meaning of their leaving experiences. The element of control cannot be understood without consideration for both the stuctural impact on athletes' retirement and the athletes' commonsense understandings of their retirement experiences over time.

Legitimation

Athletes generally regarded their retirement experiences as both expected and legitimate parts of their sport involvement. This may be explained in several ways. First, the sport cycle is a dependency builder functioning to provide necessities, a regulated pattern of activity, a comfortable and safe environment and good quality competition to its members. Athletes receive such benefits contingent upon the availability, status, prestige, experience (seasoning), potential and even the good will of the organization. Athletes generally accept as legitimate the system's control over membership and opportunity. Further, athletes accept that sport organizations may do so with little disclosure of information, planning or accountability. By extension, sport organizations are viewed as having legitimate and direct authority to control athlete retirement.

Second, athletes experience a guided pattern of dislocation and disruption throughout their participation in the quadrennial cycle. This pattern is continued through the retirement process and sport organizations legitimately continue to design the involvement process.

Third, the ideals of sport form part of athletes' education or socialization into high performance sport. A pattern of acceptence and acquiescence rather than resistance is established over the duration of involvement. Therefore, as part of the "do it right" retirement, athletes seem to expect retirement and acquieseto the right of the sport system to manage and even control their retirement experiences. Thus, the majority of high performance athletes did not question the authority of the people in positions of influence in sport to direct athlete participation and retirement experiences.

Identity Negotiation

Identity was found to contribute in a major yet distinctive way to the understanding of retirement. Athletes' self perceptions and how others sought to define them had a bearing on how athletes considered their retirement experiences.

Not all athletes had an athlete-identity. Nor did all inactive athletes consider themselves to be retired. Further, after retirement, many athletes reported that their changing identities and identities imputed by others were extraordinarily difficult to bring into focus. Clearly, there is some question about how athletes manage to "hold on to the precious self-identity" (Matthews, 1979:161).

This research suggests that the social position of an "athlete", in terms of behaviours expected or required by others, alters during the retirement process. These behaviours are governed partially by the social norms of the larger society and the sporting sub-culture. Through sport socializations, athletes understood some of those expectations at the time of leaving high performance sport.

During the retirement passage, athletes recalled various forms of identity change. Without question, athletes were differently identified early and later in the retirement process. Also, the identity changes were ongoing through retirement and afterwards, even during the data gathering interviews. Only when the behaviours expected or required were incompatible with goals, activities and, most of all, self-identity, did athletes report difficulties.

A closer examination of the first step of the retirement path reveals that athletes experienced admittance to the actuality of "being retiring", entry into the retirement passage. Often the admittance was motivated and controlled by others. Concurrent with the awareness, the identity of being an athlete began to change its meaning. For example, similar to Matthew's (1979) research on older women "being in the dying role", few athletes reported knowing how to behave as retiring athletes. Many reported a reduction in athletic involvement which coincided with a reduction in their control over their athletic identity. For some, the shifts in identity were difficult and even problematic. For others, the shifts in identity were of minimal consequence.

Just as athletes develop and protect their athletic identities, they also appeared to protect their identity changes as retiring or retired athletes. The word protect, in this instance, is the maintanence of personal identity cohesion so that it is consistant with behaviour and goals. In this study, four particular protection strategies were identified; negotiation, confrontation, role distance and tolerence of dissonance.

Negotiation was the ongoing strategy some athletes used to keep congruence between changing activity levels and changing self-definitions. Athletes reported negotiating the timing of retirement, the meaning of retirement and their control over the retirement passage in order to maintain positive self regard. However, some athletes reported a negative regard for retirement. This introduces a concept of retired athletes as occupiers of a devalued status (Matthews, 1979). There is some support for this, particularly in light of the manner in which the timing of retirement was negotiated. That is, if athletes regarded retirement negatively, they actively resisted their rate of progression through the retirement passage. Other instances of negotiation were reported by athletes positioned to choose between relevant experiences such as competing while seriously injured. Without exception, the athletes in this study reported that their involvement momentum (goals, achievements and opportunities) carried them into competition.

Confrontation, usually through resistance, was used by some athletes at the time when they were admitted into the retirement transition. Often such confrontations were related to some cynicism or disillusionment which the athletes directed against the sport system. For example, they often challenged the conditions of retirement, preferring to risk "trouble" rather that simply comply. Other athletes were confrontational in their attempts to "set the record straight" about their retirement status.

Role distance was how some athletes managed to describe themselves as different than they appeared to be to others. Thus, there were athletes who did not consider themselves as retired although they had not competed for several years. Some Olympic athletes did not consider themselves to be athletes despite their achievements at the high performance level. Others considered themselves retired although they continued to compete internationally on a "call-back" basis. These athletes were able to make sense of these apparent discrepancies by distancing their self-identity from their activities.

It appears that tolerance of dissonance is another strategy used by athletes to protect their identities. Many athletes reported that they were able to tolerate different and even conflicting identities for some time. Athlete status involves a clear understanding of both real-self identity of an athlete, perceived self identity and the identity imputed by others. As athletes move through the process of retirement, there are quite a substantial number of athletes who reported being able to live with many apparent contradictions through considerable time periods. As Miller (1984) states,

> movement across identity stages is assumed to arise from an attempt to reduce identity conflict anxiety. The assumption is that individuals have a need for a consistency of perception...It is clear,.... however, that people, via accounts, denial, and compartmentalization...can live with many apparent contradictions...consequently, identity stages need not follow one another inevitably. (1984:267)

Miller's conclusions are accurately reflected in this research. Not only do athletes tolerate apparent contradictions, they seem perfectly willing to adjust the meaning of imputed or assigned identity status.

These strategies, negotiation, confrontation, role distance and tolerance of dissonance, are among the many that athletes used to make sense of their changing identities. Other measures, which are not adequately developed to be considered as strategies, are used by athletes to evaluate their changing identiies. Discussed here are landmarking, and the outsider's view.

First, landmarking is an evaluation athletes used to asses the success of their progression through retirement. The landmarking involved athletes' comparisons with other athletes and non-athletes. The essential peerlessness[73] of the athletes made such comparisons difficult. Biological considerations such as reproductive capacity and physical development and regression are part of the landmarking process. Often, athletes expressed mystification at the nature of the lives of non-sport individuals and the essential differentness between them on almost all counts. Landmarking was one way for athletes to gather information about what they could and should be planning.

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[73] Athletes lead unique lives. Other same aged individuals are demographically

Second, athletes sometimes recalled trying to get what Simone de Beauvoir (in Matthew, 1979) called an outsider's view of themselves. The looked at themselves in order to evaluate their comparable progress and make retirement decisions based upon what they anticipated as expected of them. Chronological age, work experience, educational preparation, family status, athletic potential and realistic goals were identified as considerations as athletes tried to place themselves as participants in the social world.

Recollections of athletic identity patterns are different than current identity patterns in most athletes. From this, it can be concluded that leaving high performance sport effects major change to the identity of only some athletes. Several retired athletes were unwilling to be called athletes, to have others know that they had been Olympians or to place their Olympic credentials on job applications. These athletes considered that they either had never been or currently did not think themselves as athletes. Further, they were concerned about the inaccuracy of the interpretations of such an identity by others. These athletes reported being substantially different when they were no longer competitors, and, in fact, had almost totally reconstructed a non-athlete identity.

Others who continued to identify themselves as athletes beyond their retirement discussed more subtle differences between who they used to be and currently were. One athlete continued to be delighted by her competitive accomplishments although they were no longer in the physical performance area. Another related that as a competitive athlete, she had developed a personal sense of being invincible. She had been able to withstand inordinate amounts of stress, more so than her co-competitors. As a retired athlete, the physical invincibility was somehow reversed as she found herself unable to handle changes in temperature, avoid colds and generally be healthy. However, her mental sense of invincibility remained. She was constantly surprized at the problems this disjuncture in

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[13](cont'd) different in substantial ways. Athletes are comparable in some ways to other athletes, particularly in the same sport at the same time. The concept of sport age further illustrates that athletes can make cross-sport comparisons.

realities created for her.

Thus, there appear to be important links between individual sense of athletic identity, positive or negative regard for that identity, imputations by others and changes in that identity over time. There is, at this time, inadequate information to pursue the relation between athlete identity and retirement further. However, the caution is raised that not all athletes, even Olympic athletes, consider themselves as such. Therefore, programs developed to assist athletes with identity change management through the retirement process need to consider these identity variations.

Activity Negotiation

Similar to identity negotiation, athletes reported that their commitment to the actual activity of their sport was a major consideration in their retirement experiences. As previously discussed, the structure of sport controls the opportunities for athletes to participate at the high performance levels. Retirement then can be considered as an absence of opportunity to compete at the high performance level. Therefore, when *sport leaves the athlete* as in the Olympic Boycott of 1980 or a team disbanding, any commitment by the athlete to continue the activity is limited to lesser levels of competition.

Athletes reported that they were variously "tired of", "attracted to" or "addicted to" their sport activity. Although often resisted by the structure of sport, the athletes' commitment to continue is evidenced in their active lifestyles after retirement and their "come-back" attempts. Also, many of the athletes displayed pictures and trophies of their athletic endeavors, coached in their sport and maintained friendships with former teammates even a decade after retirement. Often, athletes' evaluations of their physical ability and performance potential seemed to have little effect on their actual retirement status. Their confidence in their abilities seemed to depend upon technical and strategic sport knowledge plus their "love of the sport". Their lack of confidence to remain or become reinvolved after retirement seemed to stem partly from the resistance of the sport system to accept them and partly from their inability to reach the peak levels of physical preparation required to be competitive at such high levels.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that commitment to activity is a major consideration in the explanation of high performance female athlete retirement.

Clarity of Retirement

Sport retirement is a complex process. To be more accurate, what may appear as a single process is actually a number of different processes woven together by the retirement path. There is no simple explanation for retirement, or a single description of what retirement involves. Clearly, it involves multiple experiences and meanings for every athlete. Just as there are different retirements, there are different retirement statuses. Similar retirement experiences can result in diverse retirement statuses. Different retirement experiences can result in similar retirement statuses. How is it possible to make sense of retirement? First, the process of retirement was found to be a commonly shared and somewhat sequential trajectory or path. The path consists of four segments, awareness of leaving, the pre-retirement interval, the act of leaving and the aftermath. It is a complex process with numerous gradations resulting from a blurring of the divisions between segments. In some ways, the cutting points between the segments are arbitrary since there are characteristics of retirement which overlap the divisions.

Second, athletes were not always aware that they were experiencing retirement. The knowlege of admittance to the retirement path was sometimes disguised or secreted from the athletes concerned until the act of leaving occurred. In such instances, the clarity of retirement was available to the athletes only as a retrospective feature of leaving.

Third, athletes did not always disclose their retirement status to others. Frequently, the communication of such information was discouraged and resisted by the structure. On other occasions, athletes found that there was an avoidance or prohibition of the topic unless it was initiated by the sport structure. As a result, athletes reported that they experienced retirement in an isolated, insular manner where their opportunities to discuss their status were limited and disclosures resisted.

Finally, even after athletes experienced retirement, many harboured the goal of returning to the high performance level. Not only is the permanency of retirement in question, but also the question of when retirement is complete. The World Master's Games, as a high performance competitive opportunity, is illustrative of the affect of opportunity on the impermanent "closure" given to retirement status.

The clarity of retirement is often clouded by the sheer diversity of experiences which comprise its descriptions. Clarity of retirement may be held by the sport structure, by the athletes, and/or by co-competitors but it is seldom openly disclosed or displayed by any of the above[74].

The Speed of Passage

The speed of retirement passage is varible. Just as being an athlete does not consume a particular time period, neither does the process of leaving. Athletes apparently may pass rapidly along the retirement path or more slowly. The retirement, with its variations on "retirement status" or leaving postures, could conceivably extend throughout the lives of some athletes. Athletes seceded from the process and returnwd to it, doubled back, retired, returned and/or held indefinite time-out statuses.

Since athletes participate on the fine competitive edge of sport, their retirement meanings are intertwined closely with their subjective understanding of the meanings of competitive involvement. For an athlete who was on the fine competitive edge for an extended time, an injury which initiates a retirement in the same competive year might be perceived as a rapid and somewhat traumatic leaving. For an athlete at a lower, more participatory level of involvement, that same circumstance might be perceived as much less rapid. Both the sport experience and retirement are more intense for the high performance athlete. The athletes' social distance from normal society is perhaps a key concept for further exploration of the time component of their retirement experiences.

Who Participates in the Retirement Process

In this study, athletes who participated in the retirement process had been highly competitive female Olympic athletes. They were individuals who concentrated on their competitive activities for between three and nineteen years. Their sport experiences were intense in focus, training and competition throughout some portion of those years.

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[74] Reasons such as unwillingness to disclose, optimism that retirement was still a long way into the future, the sense inculcated by the sport cycle that sport would take care of the athlete (Dependency building), and possibly the single focus on winning encouraged in many high performance athletes ("the eye on the gold") were potential reasons why this ostrich approach is taken and even encouraged.

In fact, some athletes identified themselves as "athletes" for only a portion of their competitive involvement, the high performance part!

All athletes inevitably leave high performance sport, though seldom sport in general. The athletes who leave high performance sport are influenced or directed by the sport cycle (obstacles, limited opportunities, coaching decisions), personal characteristics (sport and chronological age, performance potential, wear and tear), career momentum (goals, achievements), past history of sport involvement (intermittant, committed) and by their own choice.

In this study, all those who experienced the process of retirement had, at least once, been high performance athletes representing Canada at the Olympic Games. Many of them had done so more than once. They were a highly select population to study. Almost all of those surveyed (67 out of 70), considered themselves to be either permanently or impermanently retired. The other three were still involved in high performance competition.

Therefore, considering that the subjective meaning of retirement varies between athletes, it must be concluded that most (approximately 95%) of the high performance athletes experienced the full retirement path (decision-making to the aftermath) within nine years of the 1976 Olympic Games. The others (approximately 5%) experienced part of the retirement path but were not yet retired.

From the discoveries about the characteristics of leaving high performance sport, a retirement path and some of the most distinctive characteristics of athletes' experiences along the path have been addressed. There is no single retirement experience. Nonetheless, there are common retirement experiences which justify the concept "retirement path". If used cautiously, this concept serves as a useful framework to understanding the dynamic and diverse leaving experiences of individual athletes.

D. CHAPTER ONE REVISITED

> Mundane and abstract seeing show two related shapes of intentionality. Both shapes are set in a full noetic (experienced) context of beliefs, habits, ways of relating to phenomena - a sediment of ordered perceptions...whatever sediments are present in a mundane seeing must be more recalcitrant and binding for the viewer than those found in abstract seeing. (Ihde, 1977:127)

In the previous quote, Ihde asks how the researcher is to move between the simple and complex, between the abstract and the concrete. This particular research contributes to the substantive theory on status passage or transition. Theories investigated in the scholarly literature (Chapter One) and the empirical data on high performance female athletes are placed in an interactive relationship to assess the correspondence between the theories of sport retirement currently in use and the high performance female athlete data. Different levels of theoretical development, particularly categorical systems and conceptual frameworks, are considered in these evaluations. Specifically, the question addressed is "How can the data challenge and expand the substantively based theoretical approaches to sport retirement?"

First, each of the theoretical perspectives (Life Course, Career Development and Social Gerontology) is examined in relation to its ability to explain the data. Second, the problems identified in Chapter One concerning the fit between social theory and the retirement data are addressed. Directions for further research are introduced in the final section on implications.

The Life Course Perspective Evaluated

The life course perspective is defined as a progression of orderly changes as individuals age. These changes are understood to be governed by biological and sociocultural timetables (Neugarten and Hagestad, 1976). Transition from stage to stage is purported to be accomplished through management of identity crises. The sport retirement research that utilizes this perspective concentrates on the crisis aspects of transition out of competitive sport and the identity negotiations that assist adjustment.

The life course perspective may be somewhat useful for discussing the orderly biological changes athletes experience as they mature in sport. For some athletes, the biological clock is considered to be the underriding, forward moving factor which influences them to leave sport in time to marry and/or bear children. Other athletes refer to their advancing chronological and sport age as factors which act as barriers to future participation at the high performance level and as an impetus to leave competition because they are the oldest of the competitors and should retire.

Also, the life course perspective indicates that women and men experience different crises or transition points. In sport, this could be positively related to the age at which female athletes *peak* in their sports since women usually mature earlier and peak earlier than men in sports requiring reaction time, speed and strength.

However, the life course perspective remains incomplete in its capacity to explain high performance female athlete retirement. First, the biological and sociological timetables which are purported to carry athletes forward through their sport careers and subsequent retirement are unable to account for the demographic differences between athletes and non-sport cohort groups in the Canadian population. It is proposed here that there is an essential *peerlessness* that characterizes the high performance female athletes. That is, there is a lack of equitable persons with whom female athletes could be meaningfully compared. Outside the sport experience, few standards of daily life could be applied to the manner in which high performance female athletes conduct their lives. This is not to infer that the athletes are superior to the average Canadian population. Rather, they are different and those differences are so great that they render the athletes incomparable[75]. For example, the athletes are exceptionally well educated yet have poor work histories. As of 1985, fewer than one-half were married. These demographics are understandable as effects of involvement in high commitment activities such as sport, but place athletes at a distinct disadvantage in terms of analysis of their sport retirement with the life course perspective. The predicted transitions from stage to stage and the order of those transitions may be delayed or accelerated. That is, female athletes seldom experience the orderly changes predicted by the life course perspective either on time or in the established sequence.

Second, crisis negotiation in the transition between life course stages is unsupported as the manner in which athletes leave high performance sport. Athletes generally move from high performance competition to reduced levels of involvement in several ways. Although some athletes report that major identity changes were part of their retirement experiences, others describe their abilitiy to tolerate apparent contradictions in identity for a substantial length of time. Frequently, this involved an apparent lack of agreement between athletes' activity levels and reported retirement status (eg. an athlete who is no longer training but considers herself to be a high performance athlete). For some athletes, there is no demonstraable need for identity negotiation to assist with the retirement transition. Further, the quality of athletic experiences prior to the retirement process (nearing leaving) are apparently useful in enabling athletes to make ongoing changes throughout their sport experiences. ~~In~~ this way, no conflict was reported or appears necessary for athletes able to identify and plan changes in an ongoing fashion.

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[75] It is not known whether high performance male and female athletes are substantially similar or different with respect to their demographic characteristics.

Finally, the life course perspective suggests that a good transition between stages is accomplished only if the crisis negotiation is well managed by the athlete. However, athletes who recalled traumatic leaving experiences, frequently cited their perception of a lack of control and preparation time over the nature and the timing of the retirement experience. Therefore the life course perspective places an unfortunate and inappropriate onus on individual athletes to negotiate the retirement transition. At the same moment, the perspective fails to acknowledge the magnitude of the control of organized sport over the nature and timing of athletes' retirement experiences.

In summary, the life course perspective shows promise for identifying orderly biological and social changes that occur as athletes experience sport. However, it fails to consider the essential peerlessness of high performance athletes, the ability of athletes to live for an extended time with apparent identity contradictions and the lack of personal control some athletes have over their retirement experiences.

The Career Development Perspective Evaluated

This sociological perspective suggests that stages and tasks of a career cycle are linked to the biosocial life cycle because both are linked to age and cultural norms (Schein, 1978:36). Thus, career, career change and retirement are often defined in relation to external (institutional) and internal (subjective) dimensions of career occupants' experiences.

The career development perspective, applied to the sport experience, appears to account for the stages and tasks which may be identifiable in high performance sport. Also, athletes discuss *athletic careers, sport careers* and *work careers* as if they are lived experiences. Career change may also be an appropriate term for some athletes' retirement experieces; i.e.: to other work and/or family obligations.

Within the career development perspective, it is argued that sport can be viewed as work (Rosenberg, 1981) and therefore, that retirement is an appropriate term for leaving high performance sport. This may be supportable by athletes' discussions about beginning and ending goals for sport which include retiring from sport when they are unable to perform at improving levels. Also, in consideration of sport as work, the dual career perspective (McPherson, 1977) found some support in this study if "being an athlete" and "being a student" are considered as dual careers. Athletes occupying both careers described themselves as having long term goals, career paths, job movement and/or subjective assessment of the career path experience.

The career contingency perspective is most useful for discussions about how and when involvements and disinvolvements occur. The dynamic aspects of athletes competitive careers and subsequent retirement could be partially explained through the research of Scott (1982) and Prus (1982). Scott (1982) identified four major components of continuance in sport: activity entanglements, conversion, embeddedness in the social life and continuance commitment. Athletes reporting difficulties with going through with the act of retiring even after awareness of leaving and a lengthy pre-leaving interval, described "being addicted to sport" and the "hope of a come-back". Both illustrate the strength of the continuance commitments of those athletes. Scott's work suggests that more research on continuance components of the sport experience may prove useful for preparation of athletes for retirment experiences. Prus (1982) identified disinvolvement as a process equal to that of sport retirement. The five component parts he identified (change in one's form of reference, disappointment in competing; reevaluation of costs of commitment, inadequacy of relationship and change in identity) overlap considerably with the five distinctive characteristics of retirement developed in this research (goals, timing, readiness, control and identity). Although there is considerable slippage between Prus' component parts and the distinctive characteristics of retirement from this study, further research into the nature of the linkages and overlaps may prove useful to the description of retirement[76].

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[76] Areas with the best fit were: Prus' reevaluation of costs of commitment with energy in - benefit out, readiness and goals from this study; Prus' inadequacy of relationships with athlete - coach conflicts, sport cycle impact on retirement and life on hold in this study; and Prus' changes in one's frame of reference

Perhaps the strongest point in the career contingency perspective for explaining high performance female athlete retirement is the negotiation aspect. Scott (1982) suggests that negotiation of reputation is one of the essential reasons for continuence of sport involvement. The results of this study confirm that reputation is important to many athletes, particularly as it is related to sport age, devalued status as retired athletes, timing of retirement and negative meanings of retirement. Further, some athletes actually change their definition for retirement so that their status agrees with their future sport goals rather than with the apparent activity levels (i.e.: an athlete on a three year absence from high performance competitive sport who considers herself on a time-out rather than a retirement because she plans a come-back in the future). Extended from this, some athletes report a negative perception of retirement. Scott's research on reputation negotiation could be a useful expansion of the understanding of the negative perceptions some athletes hold of retirement. Further, unlike social breakdown theory proponents, neither Scott nor Prus suggest that identity negotiation is essential to smooth retirement transition. Although both suggest that identity negotiations occur, they don't foresee inadequate solutions and/or long term identity dissonance as a mismanagement of the retirement transition.

Perhaps the strongest challenge to the career contingency perspective comes from the subjective or internal dimension of athletes' experiences. Some athletes simply do not regard themselves as athletes and thus, by extension, do not view themselves as occupants of an athletic career even though objectively, they are athletes. Career contingency theory places a level of analysis about job movement and assessment of career path upon the experiences of athletes who may not subjectively or internally regard their experiences in that manner. As an example, there are several athletes who reported that they arrived at the Olympic Games in 1976 without consciously setting Olympic goals. Their subjective evaluation of their experiences is considerably different than what the career contingency perspective would suggest. This does not invalidate the career contingency perspective but certainly challenges it to explain differences between subjective and objective definitions held by career occupants.

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[76](cont'd) with enough is enough, goals and life on hold in this study.

Thus, the career development perspective is very capable of accounting for some of the distinctive experiences of athletes in transition in sport. Also, it is encouraging to note that reputation negotiation is represented as a possible rather than essential component of leaving sport. However, the career development perspective does not address the conditions under which high performance athletes leave spot. Although the institutional dimensions are considered and appear useful, the career development perspective fails to extend the understanding of the subjective assessments of careers and perceived career development in the substantive area of sport.

Social Gerontological Perspectives Evaluated

The social gerontological perspective focuses on the social and cultural meaning of aging and the continuing search for a unified theoretical perspective for the social scientific study of the life cycle. Retirement is frequently viewed in a chronological context when age and productive capacities dictate that individuals withdraw (or are withdrawn) from a position or occupation (Webster, 1969).

There are six theories which appear most prominantly in the research on sport retirement: disengagement, activity, continuity, social breakdown, exchange and social death. This current research identifies particular strengths and weaknesses in the application of each of the theories to the study of sport retirement.

DISENGAGEMENT THEORY

Disengagement theory suggests that society and individuals mutually disengage in order to minimize the shared trauma and the number of shared interactions. This study supports disengagement theory particularly in cases where athletes report personal planning and decision-making about leaving. For example, some injured athletes report that retirement is expected and they manage the timing of their retirement by preparing how and under what conditions they will leave. Some of these athletes also report that they begin to plan and prepare in ways which could be explained as disengagement. Further, disengagement theory identifies societal demands for successive cohort groups to retire. In sport, this can be regarded as synonymous with the manner in which organized sport inculcates athletes with the understanding of the appropriate time to retire. The societal demands also assist in the explanation of sport age where, for example, an athlete, oldest in relation to her teammates, reports that the "writing is on the wall" and plans her retirement for the near future. Disengagement theory is adequate for explaining particularly those sport retirements which are predictable and expected.

Within the awareness segment of the retirement path (as determined in this study), sport age, chronological age, infirmary, personal functional decrease, successive cohort groups leaving and society-oriented forces all can be identified. However, the characteristics of the awareness segment also include career momentum and the cumulative effects of a number of factors on the actual retirement decision. These are considered as useful expansions to the disengagement theory.

In the pre-leaving interval identified in this research, disengagement theory suggests that *mutual* disengagement occurs. This is only partially supported by this study. Part of mutual disengagement can be considered as athletes' partial reduction in activity. Normally, athletes do not experience this before the act of leaving unless there are special circumstances such as injury or ill health. Athletes may, however, experience disengagement after the act of leaving. This would explain such experiences as intermittant sport involvement or growth in reinvolvement activity after leaving. The other part of mutual disengagement is the minimization of shared interactions. Again, some athletes report a developing sense of isolation and separation between themselves and other sport personnel, particularly if there is an awareness of impending retirement. Other athletes report that they control the awareness of their impending leaving by not informing others. These athletes actively prevent disengagement from occurring until after they leave high performance sport. The effects of delayed disengagement activities may be an interesting research topic, particularly in relation to trauma and retirement in sport.

In cases where athletes describe "being retired" by the sport organizations, limited awareness of the retirement process is available to the athletes. In those instances, the sport clearly can control the disengagement from the athletes but the athletes may be unaware and/or unwilling to disengage from the sport. Thus, although mutual disengagement seems appropriate in some instances, the desire to disengage and the actual activity of disengaging may not be mutually shared.

The act of retirement and the aftermath described in this research may be viewed as active disengagement through both reduced activity and reduced effective attachments. Disengagement activity would, however, be hard pressed to explain the re-involvements that athletes report. Thus, the context of the reduced activity and the intended permanence of such reductions must be considered when referring to disengagements from high performance competitive sport. The reduced affective attachments are evident when several athletes report feelings of aloneness and isolation after retirement.

The increase in anormativeness predicted by the disengagement perspective is logical if the assumption that *competitve sport is normalising* is adopted. For athletes with lengthy experience in the sport environment, that might be a correct assumption. For others however, those recently arrived into the sport environment and immediately successful or those with experience only along the fine edge of intense competitive sport, their experiences within sport can hardly be considered normalizing. By extension, athletes describe both the competitive sport world and the non-sport world as if either one or the other or both could be normal reality. Thus, the concepts anormativeness and must be considered in relation to athletes' perceptions of what they are leaving upon retirement and in what they will be engaging after retirement.

Finally, disengagement theory is a functionalist approach whereby individuals are thought to establish an equilibrium which is oriented towards society until retirement at which point it becomes oriented towards the self. In sport there is a question about the applicability of such equilibriums. If equilibrium is considered as a balance between an athlete and her sport organization or her coach, then it must be said that athletes live in a constant state of disequilibrium. If athletes do experience equilibrium, how is it established? What is the self-oriented focus after retirement particularly if a come-back is anticipated? What happens to equilibrium if athletes seek other careers? Clearly, more research is needed before any conclusions can be drawn about the value of equilibrium as a concept appropriate to retiring athletes.

Generally, disengagement theory is practically useful for describing some of the reduced activities and effective attachments that athletes describe. However, as a theory, it is less useful for describing the nature of partial disengagements or of athletes who "hang on" or "linger". Further, more research about disengagement as a less than mutually engaged upon experience by athletes and the sport organization is needed before conclusions about its applicability can be made. Therefore, the mutual nature of disengagement described by the disengagement theory needs re-evaluation.

ACTIVITY THEORY

This theory proposes that work roles are replaced with other roles so that overall activity levels are maintained (Havighurst, 1957). Matthews (1979) further develops the theory by indicating that the number and quality of roles need be considered.

Minimal support for activity theory was found in this study. In support, a few athletes chose to retire because they wanted to work, to marry or to have a child. Others refer to the incorporation of activity levels, competition and high commitment factors in their post-retirement lives. Far more frequent are aftermath experiences such as a void, a sense of isolation and aloneness, a reduction in both quality and number of activity hours and difficulty in being motivated to find other activities. Further, of what would an equitable replacement for high performance sport consist? How desirable would it be to replace such intense competitive activities? Activity theory does not attempt explanations of decision-making, a pre-leaving interval or the act of retiring. Rather, it addresses only the aftermath of leaving. Clearly, activity theory is inadequate for explaining the quality or number of activities, the meaning of activities to the athletes, or the desirability of continued activity levels after retirement.

CONTINUITY THEORY

This theory suggests that athletes try to maintain a continuity of lifestyle as they age. Continuity theory identifies some of the conditions of retirement through a parallel analysis of the conditions of death such as age, lead (awareness) time, gatekeepers to the dying passage, regulated passage, controlled awareness and disordered or out-of step life patterns. The smoothness of the transition into the dying role is regarded as the result of personal stability. The theory also suggests that athletes learn to manage the retirement role by asking questions such as "How shall I act?" and "What does this mean?".

Continuity theory is useful as a descriptor of conditions of athlete retirement such as age (sport age), career length, gatekeepers (coaches and sport organizations), regulated passage (timing of retirement), controlled awareness (cut, disbanded teams, early decision-making by athletes with no disclosure) and disordered or out of step life patterns (life on hold, peerlessness). It is also an adequate theory for explaining smooth transitions into retirement, particularly with regard to identity maintanence.

The major drawbacks of continuity theory are that such a passage is irreversable and has no graduates, that continuity is normalizing and that personal stability results in smooth transitions. Clearly, when athletes are confronted by the retirement event (cut, disbanded teams), the responsibility for management of the retirement passage must be mutually shared by both the athletes and the sport organizations. Considering smooth transitions as the result of personal stability of the athletes denies that athletes and the sport environment are dynamically interactive.

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN THEORY

This theory proposes that as role loss occurs, social devaluation of personal status and skills follows. This in turn results in further role loss. The downward spirilling experience may be halted by programs involving social reconstruction. Further, social breakdown theory projects that the retirement role reinforces athletes' perceptions of incompetence and thereby ensures continued difficulties including seriously disrupted life, negative labelling, trauma, identity struggles and isolation. Some athletes with little or no perceived control over their retirement experiences described their athlete role as fundamental to their identity and, when a crumbling of that role resulted from their retirement experiences, a negative labelling and personal devaluation occurred. Particularly susceptible to such social breakdowns were athletes with positive career momentum who were confronted by an unexpected retirement.

Generally, if athletes perceived some choice in their retirement experiences or were able to prepare in the pre-leaving interval before the act of retiring, retirement was regarded as a major change, though not of the life-disruption size. For many athletes, sport is a serious venture with an expected conclusion or retirement. Retirement does not necessarily mean the abrupt end to competitive sport and many athletes continue to be competitively active at a reduced level after their retirement. For them, retirement means change and adaptation to different experience but does not involve a breakdown. Any significant trauma in the retirement experiences is generally described as the result of sudden, unexpected or out of control retirement circumstances.

Social reconstruction is identified as the antidote to social breakdown. Such reconstruction presumably allows athletes to resume normal life after retirement adjustment. What must be considered is that for many athletes normal life is regarded as the sport world. Adjustment programs, should they be needed, may well need to concentrate on teaching athletes new life skills and introducing them to rather than allowing them to resume normal life. A number of athletes seek professional counselling after retirement, but whether such counselling is social reconstruction or not is beyond the scope of this study.

In a reversal of the expected, several athletes found the experience of sport to be psychologically and/or socially debilitating. For example, one athlete described a false existence compounded by four anorexic years before she retired. Another struggled with a sexual relationship with her much older coach throughout her early teenage years. Both regard their retirement experience as the beginning of personal rebuilding rather than as a social breakdown. Thus, the nature or context of the sport experience must be considered in the descriptions of retirement.

Thus, social breakdown theory is useful in those retirement circumstances where athletes have little or no perceived control (eg: "cut" or "fired") and discuss great difficulties in managing life beyond high performance sport. However, the theory fails to explain how athletes with smooth transitions and/or with long term identity conflicts experience retirement without major upheaval in their lives. Further, it does not describe how social rebuilding rather than social breakdown can occur upon retirement.

EXCHANGE THEORY

Exchange theory establishes diminishing power and resources as characteristic of retirement experiences. There are several problems with the application of such a theory, not the least of which is a muddied definition of what constitutes resources in the sport world, and particularly, what constitutes resources for the female athletes.

Female athletes can be considered neither as powerful nor as managers of many resources. Instead, athletes generally describe having little or no control over their sport experiences. Their powerlessness is evident in a number of instances where conflicts arose and athletes either made the adjustments or they left high performance sport. Very few athletes report being able to mobilize enough resources to actually change the conflicting circumstances.

Further, athletes do receive certain "resource benefits" such as trips, funding, scholarships, uniforms and a planned training environment. These "resources" are given to the athletes rather than owned by the athletes. Upon retirement, these resources must return to the sport organization. The athletes' only resource is their competitive skill. Unfortunately, that is not a forever renewable resource. Exchange theory predicts that balanced planning and management after retirement will enable athletes to adapt to life with diminished power and resources. However, it may also be that retiring athletes leave minimal resources (in sport) and enter into experiences where a more abundant supply of resources is available. A more careful, sport specific analysis of resources may alleviate some of the discrepancies about whether resources are lost, gained or exchanged. It would be interesting to pursue the question of resources and the exchange in relation to female athlete retirement further, although it is beyond the scope of this research to do so.

In sum, exchange theory may be useful for explaining how some athletes seek some balance in their lives before and after retirement. However, retirement is a much more complex experience than loss, gain or exchange of resources would indicate. An understanding of the definition, nature and interaction of resources is necessary before exchange theory can make a larger contribution to the study of sport retirement.

SOCIAL DEATH THEORY

Social death theory has been used to describe the retirement role as being similar to the dying role. The transitions take place within the context of retiring and dying respectively and gaining meaning from such contexts. In this approach, retiring athletes are expected to be fully adapted when they come to accept their impending retirement. Unfortunately, not all athletes are aware that retirement is impending, plan their retirement and/or have some control over their retirement. Thus, some athletes find themselves in the position of coming to accept their retirement only after it occurs rather than during the pre-retirement passage.

Further, social death is described as preceeding physical death. That is, when athletes are known to be retiring or are unable to perform expected functions or are socially stigmatized, other athletes, coaches and support personnel may begin to avoid and thereby isolate such individuals. This is similar to social disengagement discussed earlier although the disengagement is unidirectional. Although athletes usually describe such isolation as occurring after retirement, isolation before retirement is perceived as something to be avoided. Athletes who "hang on too long", disclose their plans to retire or are identified as "soon to be retired" are likely to suffer from gradual isolation before leaving high performance sport. In this way, the social death analysis supports the concept of timing developed in this research.

The dying role is considered to be a uni-directional role consisting of a fixed order of rules, rituals and announcements to mark the passage. From this study, it is clear that retirement is not generally considered as uni-directional, but includes come-backs, intermittant patterns of involvement, time-outs, returns at different levels of involvement. Further, although a retirement path is described which consists of awareness of leaving, pre-leaving interval, the act of retiring and the aftermath, the athletes describe great variations in the rate and sequencing of those segments in their personal experiences. However, the retirement passage of high performance female athletes is essentially unmarked by ceremonies or events. Rather, it is an absence of those events which is perhaps more characteristic. Retirement is perhaps a single moment in a long series of moments that collectively describe an athletes' involvement in sport.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the social death theory to the study of sport retirement has to do with status transition. A number of athletes describe their retirement as a change in status from high performance athlete to a lesser status of some kind. This degradation and devaluation of the retirement role is evident in the remarks of the World Master's Games athletes who report that they had to "unlearn the belief" that they were not capable of competing internationally again. Other athletes describe difficulties in accepting the retirement role and would rather consider themselves, for example, on a "time-out" rather than retired.

Clearly, there is some support for what Rosenberg (1982) refers to as a decreasing consensual validation available for retiring athletes. The concept of sport age and the understanding that organized sport inculcates athletes with a subtle understanding that the correct time to retire is at one's peak are evidence of the utility of the concept of consensual validation.

In summary, social death theory emphasizes the physical and social pain that occurs around major transitions in life. Social isolation, inability to function in familiar ways and the ascribed roles of being a retiring athlete are interesting directions to be pursued in future research efforts. However, consideration must be given to athletes' intensity of focus (i.e. are retirement and death really similar?). Further, an understanding of how athletes become "gerontologized" by impending or actual retirement needs to be further developed. Finally, individuals in a dying role eventually die. Athletes in a retirement role have many other options open to them besides just leaving sport. For example, many athletes regard permanent retirement as the beginning of a post-competition phase of activity rather than a post-sport phase. Therefore, the rigid, fixed order and narrowly focussed dying role fail to account for the variation of experiences that collectively make up high performance female athlete retirement.

Social Theory and the Data: Concerns of Fit

In Chapter One titled *Rationale for the Study*, several concerns were identified relating to the lack of fit between social theory on retirement and the available data on female athletes. The three concerns whcih remain are briefly addressed again here.

First, there is the concern of appropriate theoretical development either directly from sociology or more specifically from sport sociology, to explain female athlete retirement. This was addressed in this study primarily by gathering empirical descriptions of retirement and systematically presenting the data. From the data base, it was possible to construct theoretical concepts (eg: *The Path of Retirement*) and assess the fit between the developed social theories and these grounded concepts.

Second, there is a concern about the lack of a dynamic and historical approach to the research on high performance female athletes. In this study, the life events of the athletes (their biographies and in particular, their sport careers) and the sport history both provided the "living" context for the experiences of the athletes. Every attempt was made to capture the retirement transition within the context of the social environment of the athletes. Further, the examination of the *events* of retirement was integrated within the study of the retirement transition or passage.

Third, three assumptions were problematic. One was the assumption of *linearity*. The discovery of the path of retirement confirms that a path is present. However, how athletes experience the transition shows considerable variation with respect to sequence, direction (i.e.: reversibility), length of time and nature of retirement experiences. Thus, linearity appears appropriate for only the most abstract level of descriptions of retirement. The second assumption is that *athletes retire from sport*. There was no support for this assumption. Almost every high performance female athlete in this study reported that she retired from high performance competition and most remained physically active and competitive in sport albeit at reduced levels. The third assumption causing concern was that *retirement is traumatic*. This study some identified retirements that were traumatic but most were not. Athletes experience retirement under variable conditions which greatly influence the degree of trauma. Goals, identity, readiness, control and timing have been identified as useful starting points to begin research into the nature of trauma in high performance retirement.

E. IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this final section, several prominent themes emergent from the research are examined. There is an appropriate time for the researcher to get involved with the interpretation of the findings, particularly when the element of praxis is strongly felt. Since it is not legitimate to prescribe actions *before the facts are in*, every attempt was made to develop the research analysis with a minimum of personal interpretation. In this way, the dangers of commitment to action without content have been avoided. However, an examination of selected themes and issues allows the underlying currents in the data of this research which did not emerge in the reporting structure and the researcher's critical analysis of the substantive area to form part of the research report.

The themes and issues addressed are not exhaustive. They focus on selected aspects of the research that are interesting, exciting and challenging. Suggestions are made for possible research directions. Ten themes are addressed, *The Last Colonial Power, Identity Negotiation, The Role of the Coach, The Flip Side - How Athletes Remain Involved, The Language of Leaving, Sport Age and Physiology, Nearing Leaving: The Obvious Gap, A Single Type of Retirement, Retirement Destinations*, and

Recommendations to the Sport Governing Associations.

The Last Colonial Power

One central feature of this study is the undercurrent of second class status assigned to athletes as participants in organized sport. It appears that the social order in sport depends to a considerable degree on the extent of institutional control and the legitimation of that control. Athletes in this study frequently perceived themselves as unable to exercise control over their lives as athletes. From the analysis, two sub-themes emerge, physical control and social control.

Physical control is one of the methods by which the sport institution maintains control over the participants. First, athletes experience daily guidance and restrictions with regard to training and competition. The sexual lives of the athletes are generally considered non-existent or unimportant. With regard to these restrictions, there are examples of athletes who were married or "in a relationship" who were barred from staying together by their coaches. Where physical or sexual abuse of an athlete did occur, there was no procedure for complaint available to the athlete. Second, injury management is another powerful form of physical control of the athletes. Retirement and injury are closely related themes in this research and the management of injuries by the athletes, by the coaches and by the medical professionals is an area where athletes have little control over their sport lives. From the athletes' reports, the sport governing associations are more concerned with medal production and athlete control than with athlete care. Third, body image of the athletes may be controlled in a number of sport situations. That is, some athletes are instructed to diet or to put on weight to improve their physical performances. Often, the instructions are unsupported by sound research and athletes receive improper guidance for managing the weight loss or gain. Also, anorexia is part of the sport subculture. The athletes perceive that sport governing associations are sometimes irresponsible and often not accountable for the consequences of that control. Under close scrutiny, the degree of physical control of the athletes by the sport governing associations appears open to challenge.

Social control is the second area of institutional control over athletes. First, athletes are encouraged to participate fully and "give everything" to sport. The logic of the intense involvement is maintained by the sport system, specifically the quadrennial cycle of opportunities and available rewards. Athletes are not encouraged to challenge the system in any way. Instead, they are expected to perform when the opportunity is provided and to retire at the right time. Organized sport inculcates athletes with beliefs, attitudes and behaviours conducive to the institutional goals. Second, the participation of athletes is often directly controlled by decisions made by others. Frequently, coaches and administrators unilaterally make decisions about team selections, punishments, planning and competitive opportunities which directly affect the athletes. Thus, when coaches "clean house", "cut athletes", "force retirement for just cause", provide inadequate or unsafe training programs and establish policies which effectively limit athletes' opportunities, they make decisions affecting athletes who themselves are unable to participate in decision-making. Such activites by sport governing associations are unjust and unpardonable. Third, institutional sport socializes athletes to "fit the mold", that is, to belong, to obey and to behave as proper representatives of the team. Athletes are expected to be model representatives of the healthy "well-rounded" lifestyle, to be energetic, focussed and similar to "the ideal athlete". This also means that they are expected to retire at the right time as determined principally by the sport association.

High performance sport is an institutional organization which offers rewards, prestige and status to successful athletes. It controls the quadrennial cycle of opportunities for competitive athletes and athlete preparation, support and selection. Athletes participate in high performance sport as *the only game in town* and generally acquiesce to the power and authority of the organization. Athletes reported that when they retired, other athletes took their place and the cycle of competitions and athlete participation continued. Clearly, this creates a picture of the athlete as expendible.

The control of the sport governing associations over athletes' sport and retirement experiences cannot be underestimated in research on sport retirement. The nature of the interaction between the institution of sport and the athletes as participants impacts on the way in which athletes experience sport retirement.

Identity Negotiation

Three themes show considerable promise for future research on sport retirement, *dissonance*, *masking*, and *identity control*.

When athletes experience inconsistencies in perceptions about who they are and/or who they appear to be, identity dissonance is said to be established. Further, identities change through the retirement process. Therefore, in the dynamics of retirement, athletes often reported living with many apparent contradictions through considerable time periods. For example, some athletes resisted the adoption of the "retired athlete" identity long after they actively ceased training. These athletes changed their definition of retirement or lived with the dissonance of conflicting identities. It appears that the resolution of identity conflict is not a high priority for some retiring athletes and thus, should not be considered as an absolute criterion for retirement adjustment programs.

Second, *masking* refers to the difficulty researchers encounter when the respondents "wear a mask in front of the researcher". In this study, the diversity of identites which athletes considered appropriate illustrate that there are layers of identity to being an athlete and also that the identity is complex and is continually negotiated over time. Since the researcher was also an athlete, the *masking* of some athletes fell away during the interviews as they ceased representing "the ideal athlete". For other athletes, the identity "masking" is one of social control where athletes determine the purpose of the research and then contribute as they believe they should. *Masking* is difficult to detect but certainly points to the importance of research on identity that is conducted over a period of time and includes both fact and meaning gathering.

Third, *identity control* is closely related to control. Athletes reflected back on their experiences and presented their common sense understanding of those experiences. For some athletes, among their experiences were many "devastating and terribly unfair" events. However, in the interviews, an unusual acceptance of these experiences was apparent. Some athletes harboured little anger about their poor treatment as competitors. Instead, they seemed, for the most part, to be very accepting and nonjudgemental. With this paradoxical attitude athletes "blamed themselves" for the poor treatment in an effort to justify why they remained in high performance sport. There seems to be considerable effort by the athletes to recall their past experiences in a positive way.

Identity has been identified as an important area for further research. These three considerations and the relations between them are good starting points.

The Role of the Coach

The control of the coach over the initiation of the retirement experiences of athletes has been well documented. However, little is known about how coaches experience the retirement of their athletes. Further, little is understood about the nature and accuracy of selection procedures that coaches frequently use to reduce competitive opportunities for athletes. Research into the coaches' role in athlete retirement is certainly a rich area for research.

The Flip Side: How Athletes Remain Involved

Athletes enter competitive sport, continue to be involved, retire or become uninvolved and may become reinvolved. There is a push and pull dynamic to these involvements. Therefore, the study of which conditions contribute to the continuance of athlete involvement are significant to research on athlete retirement. Each will undoubtedly add to the other.

The Language of Leaving

Further research on athlete retirement must consider the implications of the use of research language such as *retirement* and *leaving*. The language of the athletes is precise and useful in capturing the subtle shifts in meaning in different retirement experiences that cannot be captured by the more general language. The 'lay' language is, however, rooted in the sport context. In research on sport retirement, identification of the research language and the 'conceptual baggage' such language might carry is necessary. In that way, pre-conceptions about athlete retirement would be addressed early in the research and more accurate research will result.

Sport Age and Physiology

Sport Age is defined in this research as age in the sporting context. It is a relative term that incorporates the patterns of sport involvement in specific sports. For example, novice age, peak age and retirement age have similar meanings across all sports. It is also known that physical development of the female body imposes limits on the potential performance over time in sport events. The relation between various sport ages and athletes' aerobic capacity, speed, reaction time, strength, power and technical development shows promise. The relation between such research and the retirement process would be profitable indeed.

Nearing Leaving: The Obvious Gap

One of the conditions of retirement discussed in this research was *nearing leaving*. This established the importance of the ongoing, forward moving nature of athletes' sport involvements in the description and explanation of their retirement processes. It was also discovered that information on *nearing leaving* is available only upon reflection about retirement. Athletes reported on their *nearing leaving* conditions as an afterthought during the interviews.

From these, it appears that athletes were never aware of the impact of the sport structure and generally unaware of the importance of *nearing leaving* on their retirement experiences. They were also unaware that their retirements "could have been" a topic of discussion and preparation before they entered into the passage. By allowing and encouraging athletes to reflect upon their retirement experiences before they occur, it seems likely that this would solve many of the structural and experiential problems encountered by the retiring athletes.

A Single Type of Retirement

Sport retirement has been studied as if it were a single phenomenon. This research has revealed that sport retirement is a number of different events and adequate theorizing or explanation must deal with each of the retirement events in a different way or it will be unsuccessful.

Both individual experiences and structural events and circumstances shape the retirement experience. Even the most varied and contradictory events of sport may equally serve as the pretexts for retirement. When specific causes vary, the experience of retirement varies. Therefore, retirement must be considered as a prolongation of the social conditions of "being an athlete" within the structure of high performance sport. Future research would be well advised to search for the unique threads of experience that form the overall fabric currently named sport retirement.

Retirement Destinations

Just as the social conditions of "being an athlete" are part of sport retirement, retirement destinations form another. The athletes in this study had difficulty planning or projecting into the future and few recalled being able to do so as high performance athletes. Links between how athletes experience sport, the retirement path and retirement destinations (particularly the permanency of such destinations) would seem to be a logical direction for future research.

Recommendations to Sport Governing Associations

The principle recommendation to the sport governing associations is that they revamp the nature of relations they foster between athletes and the sport governing association personnel such that it be inclusive of the information revealed in this research. First, sport governing associations are encouraged to develop a management process whereby they are accountable to athletes for their actions, responsible for the consequences of those actions and share in the decision-making aspects of those actions with athletes who are directly affected by such actions. Second, sport governing associations are encouraged to develop a more humanistic, athlete centered approach to the identification, development and retirement of high performance female athletes. Third, sport governing associations are encouraged to develop a management style appropriate for highly skilled, responsible athletes where athletes have some responsibility and control over the sport lives. Finally, sport governing associations are encouraged to study concepts which have developed out of this research and will advance the *Path of Retirement* model such as sport age, the quadrennial cycle, gender and retirement.

athletes and the power imbalance and the retirement path. Further, themes such as readiness, identity, goals, timing and control are useful starting points for research into athlete careers and athlete retirement.

Athletes should be able to participate in high performance sport and subesequently leave or retire from the high performance level with pride, honor and dignity. Unfortunately, this research did not find that to be the norm.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF THE 1976 FEMALE OLYMPIC ATHLETES

SPORT BIOGRAPHY

As with nearly all questionnaires, there may be some questions which seem unnecessary to you. However, the questionnaire has been made as brief as possible and each item meets a specific objective. Please answer all the questions carefully and honestly. Remember that your responses will remain absolutely confidential. It should take approximately 30 - 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire. After you finish, it can be returned in the stamped self-addressed envelope provided. Thank you for your assistance.

A. PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: ____

Address: ____

__________________ Postal Code: ____________________

Telephone: Home__________ Business ____________

Marital status (check one)

Married_____	Separated_____	Single_____
Divorced_____	Widowed_____	Other_____

Birthdate: ____________________

Do you have any children? yes____ no____

If yes, what are their ages?______________________

Do you have any brothers and sisters? yes____ no____

If yes, what are their ages?______________________

Do you have living parents? Mother?____
Father?____
Neither?____

Have your parents ever separated or divorced?
yes____ no____

Have one or the other of your parents ever remarried?
yes____ no____

B. OCCUPATION

Recognizing both paid and unpaid work, what do you consider to be your occupation at the present time? ______________________________

The following is a list which can be used to describe some occupations. Please mark the one which best describes your occupation with a number 1.

Please mark the next best descriptor of your occupation with a number 2.

Professional ____________	Unemployed ________
Managerial/Entrepreneur ______	Volunteer ________
Clerical ____________	Athlete ________
Blue Collar ____________	Home Worker ______
Student ____________	Other(s) ________

What do you expect you occupation to be in the future? Why do you expect this to be so?

What is/was your Mother's occupation? ______________________________
What is/was your Father's occupation? ______________________________

C. EDUCATION

Can you describe your formal education by including years of schooling, institutions you attended and any degrees, diplomas and/or certificates that you obtained in particular areas of study?

(e.g.: 1973-77 Capilano College....Diploma in Recreation)

D. WORK EXPERIENCE

Can you describe, in a similar fashion, any part time, full time, contract work and/or volunteer work that you have experienced?

(e.g.: 1977 summer part time lifeguard at Les Isles de Madeline, P.Q.)

E. OLYMPIC SPORT EXPERIENCE

Recognizing that some women have competed in more than one Olympic sport, in which Olympic Games and in which sport(s) have you participated?

Olympic Games	Sport (summer/winter)
1960 ________	________________________
1964 ________	________________________
1968 ________	________________________
1972 ________	________________________
1976 ________	________________________
1980 ________	________________________
1984 ________	________________________

How old were you when you first started competing in your Olympic sport(s)?

First sport ________ Second sport ________

How many years, in total, have you competed in your 1976 Olympic sport(s)?

First sport ________ Second sport ________

What was the approximate date of your last competition in your Olympic sport(s)?

First sport ________ Second sport ________

F. CURRENT SPORT INVOLVEMENT

The research is primarily concerned with how and under what conditions high performance female athletes leave competitive sport. Please read carefully and check all the descriptions which fit your sport experience at this time.

As an ATHLETE, I am:

a) Still competing yes____ no____
If still competing, is it
at the national or international level? yes____ no____
in the same sport(s) as 1976:
First sport yes____ no____
Second sport yes____ no____
b) Thinking about making a comeback? yes____ no____
c) Taking a season off? yes____ no____
d) Leaving sport as an athlete is/has been seriously considered? yes____ no____

As a SPORTING INDIVIDUAL, I am:

(Including sport and recreational activities in which you participate)

	1st sport/ activity	2nd sport/ activity	3rd sport/ activity
a) Involved in sport as an athlete and/or participant.			
b) Involved as a coach level? certification? volunteer/paid?			
c) Involved as an administrator level? certification? volunteer/paid?			
d) Involved as an official level? certification? volunteer/paid?			

	1st sport/ activity	2nd sport activity	3rd sport/ activity
e) Involved in teaching or researching level? certification? volunteer/paid?			
f) Involved in other capacities level? certification? volunteer/paid?			

G. SPORT HISTORY

The following is a time-ordered chart. Beginning with when you first remember competing in any sport or participating in any recreational activity, please fill in the chart in as much detail as possible. If you wish to add more information on a separate sheet, feel free to do so.

Let me give you an example first.

Years	Residence	Sport/Recreation	Competitive Results
1977-81	Family Home Vancouver	track, swimming summer camp U.B.C. Intramurals	University teams, C.I.A.U. Gold in Swimming, 1980.

(continued on the next page)

Years	Residence	Sport/Recreation	Competitive Results

H. FUTURE PARTICIPATION AND COMMENTS

Would you be willing to be interviewed about your experiences as a high performance female athlete?

yes____ [✓ no____]

Do you have any comments about eith the format of the questionnaire, the nature of the questions, or about the content of what you have written?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR RESPONDING.

APPENDIX B

Athlete Distribution by Sport, Birth Year, Start Age, Competitive Years and Age at Retirement

1976 Olympic Female Athletes

Olympic Sport	Number	Birth Date	Start Age	Number of Competitive Years	Average Retirement Age
Archery	2	1953	15.0	16.5	31.5
Basketball*	7	1954	13.0	14.5	27.5
Canoe-Kayak	3	1956	13.0	12.0	25.0
Diving	3	1954	11.0	12.0	23.0
Equestrian	4	1950	11.0	11.0	22.0
Fencing	1	1942	15.0	19.0	36.0
Gymnastics	1	1954	11.0	11.0	22.0
Handball*	2	1954	15.0	14.5	29.5
Rowing*	19	1952	20.5	4.2	24.7
Shooting	1	1950	12.0	14.0	26.0
Swimming	13	1960	7.5	12.8	20.3
Track	8	1953	14.0	12.0	26.0
Volleyball	6	1952	16.6	12.0	18.6

*New Sport, 1976 Olympics

APPENDIX C

Categories

A1	Age
A2	Asking Back
A3	Alone-Lonely
B1	Body Image
B2	Boycott
B3	Boyfriend/ Girlfriend/Brother Sister/ Retirement
C1A	Work/ Sport/ Retirement
C1B	Finances/ Sport/ Retirement
C1C	School/ Sport/ Retirement
C1D	Marraige/ Sport/ Retirement
C1E	Children/ Sport/ Retirement
C1F	Friends and Family/ Sport/ Retirement
C1G	Life in General/ Sport/ Retirement
C1H	Religion/ Sport/ Retirement
C2	Coaching Women
C3	Comeback
C41	Sport Career
C42	Athletic Career
D1	Disjunctures/ Out of Step
E1	Ethics
F1	First Woman
F2	Friendships
F3	Family
F4	Future Goals/ Planning
F5	Famous Names/ High Profile
F6	Female Testing/ Feminism
F7	Feminism/ Consciousness Raising
I1	Idols/ Heros/ Models
I2A	Identity- Personal Self
I2B	Identity- As Others See You
I2C	Identity- As You Define Yourself
I3	Injuries
I4	Interview Comments
J1	Job/ Worker Identity
L1	Luck or Timing
M1	Marriage Forms
M2	Mentor (Having or Being)
M3	Motherhood and Retirement
M4	Medals/ Results
M5	Media Identity and Problems
P1	Politics and Sport
R1	Retirement-Leaving non-sport
R2	Retirement-Leaving sport
R3	Recall Problems
S1	Schooling
S2	Sexuality
S3	Shit Disturbing Athletes
S4	Significant Others
S5	Skill Lessons
S61	Sport History Personal History
S62	Sport History Comparative History
S63	Sport History Particular Sport History
S7	Siblings
T1	Turning Points
T2	Burn Outs/ Time Outs
W1	Weight

APPENDIX D

I.

THE LANGUAGE OF LEAVING

> But we have different voices, even in sleep,
> and our bodies, so alike, are yet so different,
> and the past echoing through our bloodstreams
> is freighted with different language, different meanings-
> though in any chronicle of the world we share
> it could be written with new meaning...
>
> Adrienne Rich, *Twenty-one Love Poems*

A description of the language specific to leaving sport is necessary for two reasons. First, subsequent reading can be done knowledgeably and within the specific context of sport. Second, the language used is specific and appropriate for athletes to describe their retirement experiences. The language presented here is their language.

Describing athletes' overall orientation towards retirement is problematic and no easy solutions are apparent. For example, two athletes, both using the word retirement , may consider their status with respect to sport very differently. Conversely, athletes using dissimilar language may be referring to identical experiences with leaving high performance sport. The words central to the understanding of leaving, what is explored here, must include athletes' own definitions using their own frames of reference. This chapter, therefore, contains words and expressions that appear throughout the research and, in particular, the interviews on how and under what conditions high performance athletes left sport.

Given the definitional problems and the nature of the retirement research discussed in chapter one, this examination of the language of leaving reflects many of the connotations attached to particular words and expressions. Words that are specific to the contextual references of the athletes allow the subtler shades of meaning to emerge. They are imaginative and display the breadth of the conditions in which athletes experience leaving. The language of leaving used by the athletes is presented in a lexical fashion, in groupings of words. Within each grouping, words are defined in alphabetical order. From these, it is anticipated that the full diversity of leaving experiences can be more easily and accurately examined.

Being on the National Team

Career Momentum

-condition and/or rate of athlete development; incline or decline of athlete ability over time.

Make It

-expression for being named to the National Team or for achieving set goals.

Optimal

-general word for reaching performance peak; one's best level of performance. "I barely scratched my optimal, then retired." (024)

Trade-Offs

-delicately held balance of activities and responsibilities. "She made a number of trade-offs so that she could compete a little longer." (004)

Forewarnings of Leaving

Death Bell

-an expression used by some athletes denoting the point at which retirement is recognized as imminent. "That's it! It's over. It was like a death bell. I was gone!" (014)

Losing Perspective

-unable to focus on single sport goal; conversely, only able to focus on sport goal. This perspective was dependant on sport and life goals. "I lost my perspective and was spinning my wheels, going 100 different directions." (006)

Writing on the Wall

-metaphorical expression to denote the 'posting' of team lists. Names absent from the list are no longer part of the National Team program. "The writing was on the wall because M. was catching up to me." (014)

Leaving or Retirement Expressions

Breakdown (Cracked)

-expression denoting a moment in time where athletes suddenly are unable to handle the pressures of high performance involvement or sport retirement experiences; usually followed by extended time-out and/or some measures of adjustment. "I just cracked. Stop the practice. I want to leave." (009)

Burned Out

-exhausted resources; no more to give; tired out; overtrained; past my limitations; mental toughness "took a holiday." "I was just so burned out I couldn't even train consistantly." (007)

Clean House

-expression for action by coaches and/or sport governing associations of selecting out those athletes no longer considered advantageous to the program.

Contact Shift (Change of Priorities)

-change in focus or competitive involvement; reduction from primary focus to secondary or tertiary priority. "Training used to be my first priority but with the contact shift, now it's third or fourth." (024)

Cut (Dumped, Bumped-Off, Unseated)

-expression used by athletes to describe reductions in the number of National Team trialists or team members. Athletes unsuccessful in being named to the team often were considered to be "cut". The 'cut' could occur during preparations for the international competitive season or immediately upon it's conclusion. "The coach cut two of us while we were still on the plane coming back from the European Tour." (015)

Cut-Off (Shut-Off)

-the severing of the link between the athletes and the National Team program; coaches' or sport governing associations' way of severing involvement with an athlete. "They cut us off from the lifeline". (030)

Demoted

-athletes moved (by others) to a level of lesser involvement; to a less successful team; named spare after being a full team member moved off first string or away from the center of the action.

Died

-after passing through athletic experiences, athletes passed away. "They didn't die. They just became old rowers." (001)

Dissappear Slowly (Dissipated)

-post-retirement fate of some athletes. "They retired and I often wondered what happened to them". (013)

Disbanded

-cancellation of National Team program[1] which eliminated the opportunities for National Team athletes to continue in their sport at the high performance level.

Eased Out

-manner of reducing involvement from intense to less intense level with intent to gradually leave high performance competition. "I eased myself out of competition by only competing in the relays". (017)

Ending

-actively finishing sport involvement at the high performance level. "It was like ending your love affair". (004) "I wanted to end it once I'd done it all". (024)

-marked by such acts as hanging up one's blades or one's competitive equipment for the final time.

Fading

-gradual reduction of involvement by an athlete whereby profile, presence and performance results decrease. "She just faded away. It was unreal". (031)

Fall (Downer)

-the beginning of the decline in performance ability or performance results.

Finished (Stopped)

---

[1] The National Team program in any high performance sport primarily consists of athlete identification and development programs which lead to the production of internationally competitive teams.

-point at which involvement in high performance sport is completed; nothing more to give; can not do more. "I can do nothing by myself so I just stopped". (004) "I stopped racing seriously in 1981. That's when I really finished". (001)

Forced to Leave (Lost to Sport)

-athlete pushed away from opportunities for involvement. "The coach forced the uncommitted players to leave." (012)

Free Ride (Coasting)

-expression for continued involvement at the high performance level despite reduced personal commitment to training and performance goals; the down side.

Get Out

-opposite of stay in or remain involved; to leave high performance sport. "If you are not enjoying it, get out". (004)

Hang On

-expression for continuing involvement of athletes past expected or actual peak of performance; negative expression for older competitors.

Leaving (Retirement)

-the act of departing or the plan to depart from active competition at the high performance level. "I am not leaving sport yet, just the heat of the battle." (016:13)

Open the Cage Door (Cut or Set Adrift)

-expression used by some athletes to indicate the moment of retiring (cage refers to sense of being contained or controlled as athletes). "They opened the cage door and pushed me out." (030)

Over the Hill

-has-been; going down; out on the down side; begin to slide; fall; decline.

Quit

-to cease current level of involvement as in quit playing, quit international competition or to quit professional sport.

-also used to denote severing of current involvement intensity as in quit trying or quit thinking about a comeback.

Released

-let out of, in this case, informal contractual arrangements with coach or sport governing association; may lead to permanent leaving.

Retirement (Leaving)

-the act of leaving or of severing ties with current high performance competitive sport involvement; the state or condition of no longer actively competing at the high performance level of sport.

Shut Out

-coach, sport governing association and perhaps even other athletes' withdrawal or disengagement from retiring athlete. "The coach shut me out when I told him I wasn't going to compete any longer." (011)

Squeezed (Unfinished)

-sensation of pressure created when athlete must leave before she is ready. "I wanted to keep going but others were catching up. I was squeezed in time." (004)

Tapering

-expression for reducing training load before major competitions; also used to denote reducing level of intensity of involvement for a period of time; similar to an active time-out.

Thrown Out (Fired)

-forced leaving; athlete's sudden leaving initiated by coach and/or sport governing association (negative reasons are usually given for initiating the action).

Turned Off

-withdrawal of energy from sport involvement; reduction in involvement because of poor quality of the experience. "I just turned off and never wanted to play again." (012)

Used Up

-sense of expended resources with little remaining; referring to used up potential, used up energy, used up commitment. "I used up my potential and I began to resent the time that training took." (027) "I was old and used up and they pushed me out." (008)

Walk Away (Left, Turned My Back)

-act of leaving high performance sport without ceremony to mark the occasion. "I walked away from the sport at the Olympic Games. I've never gone back." (012)

Returns or Reinvolvements

Call-back

-formal act by the coach or the sport governing association requesting a National Team athlete to return to the team on a temporary basis.

Change Events (Changed Sports)

-athletes delay retirement by changing to longer competitive races (eg. from 200 meter run to 800 meter run); athletes change sports completely and remain competitive at least at the national level (eg. rowing to marathon canoeing).

Come-back

-generally athlete-initiated attempt for successfull reinvolvement in high performance sport; post-retirement return; post-leaving return; post time-out return. "I made a come-back the next year and was named to the 1980 team." (023)

Drag Out

-derogatory expression for the act of calling-back retired National Team athletes to assist particular competitions.

Go Back

-form of reinvolvement in sport, often difficult; similar to come-back but element of 'successfull' return is not necessarily included.

Time Out

-time away from training or routine, from competition, possibly away from sport with the intent to return to past level of involvement; temporary rather than permanent leaving; sometimes a forerunner to retirement.

After Leaving

Big Hole (Emptiness, Huge Gap, Huge space)

-expression referring to chasm created by leaving high performance sport involvement.

Detraining

-athletic activity continued at reduced level of intensity in order for gradual and less stressfull leaving or retirement to occur.

Starting to Live

-expression for altered activity orientation post-retirement that alludes to the former restriction of normal daily living activities.

Stepping into Reality

-expression for entering a new, different experience post-competitive sport, the connotation of the statement is that high performance sport involvement is not part of reality.

Void

-expression for lack of immediate post-leaving activities and goals of some athletes.

Used to Be

-expression referring to past successes or identities, usually related to athletic performances or athletic identity.

A. DISCUSSION OF THE LANGUAGE OF LEAVING

The language of leaving is used as a means of communication between athletes and between social scientists. Athletes use the general terms *retirement* and *leaving* even though athletes report that the language is not specific or contextualized enough to be precise or truely appropriate. How then can the language best be understood?

First, there are the common words retirement and leaving.

> RETIREMENT: the act of severing ties with current high performance competitive sport involvement; the state or condition of no longer actively competing at the high performance level of sport.
>
> LEAVING: the act of departing or the plan to depart from active competition at the high performance level.

These definitions were developed from the athletes' use of the words. From those definitions, little of how or under what conditions the athletes retire from sport can be discerned. Perhaps the following discussion can show some of the complexity involved in the use of such language.

Leaving, one of the general words used by the athletes, shows varied usage. Leaving was used in a manner less specific than retirement. It was used primarily to indicate the act of leaving rather than any status associated with the act. For example, as one athlete recalled:

> I haven't left the sport, just the heat of the battle. (016:13)

To 'have left' is not the same as to 'have retired'. Athletes could leave, leave and return, leave but not retire, leave for a short while, leave for a long time, leave permanently, leave by stopping, leave by abandoning and leave by simply quitting. Athletes left competition, international competition, the National Team and/or sport.

Retirement, the other generally word, shows an equally broad usage. The athletes sometimes had difficulty in locating just the right word for their experiences. One athlete, in particular, struggled to come to some appropriate definition of retirement at the end of her interview.

> I use the word retirement almost exclusively as retirement from international competition. It's jargon really. Athletic careers are like that too. Sport is a past-time. Athletics is a pursuit of a goal. To say I retired from an athletic career is an automatic word; career and retirement. But, since I'm not clear about what really an athletic career is, I can't say that retired is a word that means a lot. I retired from being an international competitor but I didn't retire from sport. I still race even. So it's not sport retirement. It's athletic career retirement, maybe. (009:94-106)

This athlete considered retirement to be exclusively that of permanently leaving or withdrawing from international competition. Another athlete allowed for the possibility of a "come-back" within her understanding of retirement. Others used the word retirement as an expression of such diverse experiences as involuntary retirement, pro-sport retirement and official retirement. Some athletes had not retired because they were still involved in athletic training. Others were retired because they were only involved in athletic training. Some athletes considered that they only could retire once from a sport and all the other interruptions to the continuity of their involvement must be time-outs or rest times. Others returned to the same sport several times but retired in between each involvement. Athletes reported retiring officially, formally, informally, frequently, permanently, once, often, never, involuntarily, suddenly and over a period of time. They reported retiring from such experiences as training, competition, international competition, the National Team, the amateur level and the activity. Clearly, the term retirement includes much of the diversity of athletes' experiences but considerable confusion exists about what may be the most appropriate definition.

Leaving is a term inclusive of retirement and vice versa. However, for some athletes, it is not possible to separate how the words are used. That is, the words are simple because they are meant to be general but they are also complex because they are umbrella terms for a wide variety of leaving experiences. Consequently, in this dissertation, the terms retirement and leaving are used interchangeably. This use is supported by the principles of economy, neatness and understandability.

The general language must be used cautiously. Since the social reality of the athletes is reflected in their use of language, the authenticity of their expressions or the 'lay' language is considered important to this research.

--Consider the theoretical language currently used to describe retirement. Of the non-sport specific research on retirement, the expressions 'rite of passage' (Jenkins and Hall, 1975)[2], career change (Schein, 1978) and retirement transition (Onions, 1973) were not expected among the reports by the athletes. This is not an indication that they are invalid, only that they are conceptual baggage when attempting to research specifically how athletes represent their experiences[3].

Second, from the research specifically upon athletic retirement, three theoretical expressions were not represented, disinvolvement (Prus, 1982; Scott, 1982), shifts of interest (Greendorfer, 1984) and disengagement (Rosenberg, 1981). Clearly, these terms are useful but are theoretical constructs placed upon the athletic experience through research. Disinvolvement is a useful catch-all term for actual reductions in both the activity of sport and of its social context but is not expressive of how and under what conditions the athletes regard those changes of experience. Shifts of interest, as an expression, perhaps reflects one athlete's comment about 'contact shift' and another's 'change in priorities'. The language the athletes use is, however, considerably more meaningful since the production of the language was originally caught in everyday life, i.e.: contextualized. The third expression, disengagement, is also unspecific. One athlete, in her description of leaving, actually used the analogy of a broken marriage to describe the pain she associated with leaving sport. Others spoke of broken informal contracts but none referred specifically to engagement into sport or disengagment afterwards. From these expressions, the difficulties of using research imposed meanings as if they are part of athletes' own experiences is critical and avoidable.

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[2] As one author stated, "it is disconcerting to watch the young girl of today grow into manhood." (Weber, 1927)

[3] For example, the 'rite of passage' may be supportable as a link between boyhood and manhood for males and even for male athletes but the expression seems inappropriate for female athletes passing from girlhood to womanhood. Career change may be somewhat more appropriate for the female athletes even though many of them did not consider their high performance sport involvement to be a career. If athletic involvement is not a career, then retirement from high performance involvement could hardly be considered a career change. Retirement transition also appears to be useful althought it can not be expected to appear amongst the athletes' expressions. Although it may be that athletes consider leaving high performance sport to be one of many significant changes in their lives, transition "from" high performance sport to what?" is the question. Athletes spoke of leaving and retiring but were not nearly so precise about what goals and activities were possible post-retirement. Thus, even the most innocuous of expressions for sport retirement have connotations of experiences foreign to the female athletes.

Unusual language which appeared but could not be considered as common expressions for athletes experiences, added certain flavour to particular athletes' reports. Words such as death and/or dying appeared only in the sense of "death bells" ringing or "they didn't die. They just faded away". There was certainly no support for extending the language into Kubler-Ross's stages of grief management. Related to that, the word "graduation", as in "graduating from high school" or "death has no graduates" appeared only once. One athlete referred to her retirement as a "graduation to recreation". Finally, athletes did not speak of sport retirement but did speak of retirement from high performance activities. Thus, their continued involvement in sport precluded any sense of retiring from sport.

The difficulty with the use of language stems from a single source. When theoretical constructs are used as if they are part of the experiences of the athletes, inappropriate conclusions can result. Also, when the precise language of the athletes is used, it must be considered as the 'lay language' or the language rooted in experience and not as abstracted theoretical constructs. Thus, the everyday or 'lay' language and the research language each have their appropriate uses.

B. CONCLUSION

The language of leaving, principally the word retirement is considered to be largely inadequate for the research on how athletes recall their leaving experiences. 'Lay' language which defines athletes' overall orientation towards leaving is problematic partly because dissimilar language was used by athletes when describing similar circumstances, and partly, the reverse. A more expressive language is needed in order for the diversity of the athletes' experiences to be accurately described. The general terms retirement and leaving were commonly used by both the researcher and the athletes at the cost of precision and sport specificity. Sport specific language developed primarily by individuals or groups of athletes from their experience was useful for allowing the contextual references and shades of meaning to emerge.

Not only are the sport specific expressions used by the athletes more accurate, they are ultimately more useful at the initial data gathering level than the commonly accepted empirical term, retirement. Consider for example, research conducted on the permanency of athletic retirement. Further consider the experiences of two athletes. One regards her sport retirement as "burn out" but with the possibility of a "come-back". The other views her retirement as an unfair "cut" during a selection procedure into which she had no input and no opportunity to return to that sport. Research into "sport retirement" would not be precise enough for those differences to appear. Instead, the researcher may conclude that the results to her study were inconclusive. For more concise, precise substantive conclusions to be reached, more accurate language is required.

From a research perspective, the use of theoretical constructs (eg. transition, retirement or disengagement) becomes problematic when they are attributed to the lived world of the athletes. Since the purpose of this research is to study how and under what conditions athletes leave high performance sport, in the presentation of the data priority is always given to the 'lay' language. The spectrum of words and meanings used by the athletes of this study certainly provides for a much broader and more accurate scope for this particular research.